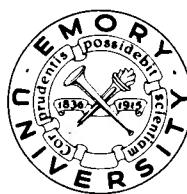




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F A I R L Y W O N ;

OR,

THE HEIRESS OF ENDERLEIGH.

A Story.

BY

H. S. E.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

L O N D O N :

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FAIRLY WON;

OR,

THE HEIRESS OF ENDERLEIGH.

CHAPTER I.

THE last thing they saw of Mr. Wentworth was a wild rush which that gentleman made to the side of the boat just as it was moving off, followed by a frantic endeavour to jump on shore again, which might have ended very seriously for himself, if he had not been held back by force.

“ You must come by the next boat, there is no help for it,” he shouted out when he found himself pinioned in Arthur Fitzgerald’s arms. The advice was good, but it was easier said than done.

Before they were half-way off the pier,

they had received the pleasing intelligence that the last boat for Bonn that night was the one which they had just so cleverly missed. The storm had been so violent higher up the river, that no more boats had started. "It was not safe to sail through the Lurlei in such weather," one of the boatmen said.

What was to be done? To follow the steamer was quite impossible, whatever it might have been on a calm night. Already it was out of sight, and only to be distinguished through the mist by the bright red lamp she had hoisted at her masthead; and equally hopeless was the thought that those on board could be made to stop or come back for them.

"What *are* we to do?" asked Edith, rather piteously.

"Certainly not to stand here any longer just at present in this pitiless storm," Captain Neville answered, as another vivid flash of lightning, followed instantaneously by a clap of thunder louder than any they

had had before, made both start, and one tremble.

He had her hand fast within his arm the next moment. "Try not to be frightened or annoyed," he said, very kindly, "this is most vexatious, certainly, but I will do all I can to help you. Only let me see you safe under shelter first, and then we will think what had better be done."

He was nearly as vexed as she was at the turn affairs had taken, but if anything was likely to re-assure her, it was the calm kind way in which he spoke. She knew then by a true instinct, that come what might, as far as her companion was concerned, she should have no need for uneasiness, and felt sure even, that so long as they should be alone in each other's company, she would not again have to turn away her eyes from his, as she had been obliged to do when they had been walking down the pier together only ten minutes before. And she was right. Annoying as the whole affair was, not for one single

moment during the hours that followed had she the slightest cause to regret that the last boat for Bonn which was steaming so fast away down the river, had not left her standing *quite* alone upon the pier.

“There’s the ferry,” suggested Neville, as they went up the steps of the hotel. “If only the storm would give over a little.”

Of course there was the ferry, the pretty little ferry-boat to the left of the village, which they had watched going backwards and forwards so many times in the morning and afternoon. How stupid not to have thought of it before. There was only one drawback to this arrangement, the ferry-boat never plied after sundown. The man belonging to it would be gone home by that time, the innkeeper said, and neither threats nor bribes would induce him to break through his rule, particularly on such a night as this. N.B.—Germans, like cats, have a vast dislike to rain.

To use a figurative expression, Captain Neville’s face fell at least two inches at this

unwelcome intelligence, for the ferry had been his only and his forlorn hope, but he kept his back turned towards Edith, so that she might not see his disappointment. He never doubted what he had been told. If he had been in France he might not have despaired, but he knew the German or rather the Rhenish Prussian character too well, not to believe what the landlord had said. The latter was courteous and obliging, and offered to go with him and see if any of the numerous boatmen who had been so clamorous for their patronage in the morning, could be induced to row them over (weather permitting), in an open boat, to the left bank of the Rhine. This was the only hope which now remained.

“You will not mind staying here for a few minutes, while I go to see what can be done,” Captain Neville said to Edith, as he stood by her side, wide-awake in hand, awaiting mine host’s return. “You may trust me to do the best I can. If, after all, you are obliged to spend the night at

Königswinter, believe me it will not be my fault." If Edith had been leaning on Mr. Wentworth's arm at that moment, most likely the young man would have added, "or my misfortune either," but as it was, neither his lips or his eyes expressed the involuntary thought.

Edith did trust him thoroughly, and she said so frankly enough, but she was in no humour for talking much.

"No, no, good dog," said Captain Neville, as he was leaving the house, to Rupert, who had evinced a sudden inclination to accompany him. "You must stay with your mistress, she wants you more than I do."

He seemed a long time gone. The minutes passed very slowly to poor Edith, as she sat there 'in the gloaming,' awaiting his return, for she had nothing to do, and only the Prince to keep her company. The poor dog crept close to her, and kept looking up wistfully in her face, saying as plainly as any dog could do,—"Indeed, I am very

“sorry, but I don’t think it was my fault.” Presently she became sensible of his penitent attentions, and made him happy by caressing his shaggy head. It was wonderful the sense of protection she felt from his companionship. At last she heard Captain Neville’s footstep on the pathway outside; she knew it quite well by this time you see.

“Well,” she said, starting up as he came into the room, “what success have you had?” All she could do she could not help her tone being a little impatient. She saw the answer in his face before he could speak, though, when he did, it was in as light and cheerful tone as he could command.

“Such ill success, that the best thing you can do is to take off your cloak and hat, and let me order some supper for you at once, for there is no hope of your getting over to Bonn to-night.”

She was too generous to let him see how heartily disappointed she was at his failure, when she knew well how hard he had tried to serve her. She only said, “Will none of

the boatmen venture across? They should be well paid."

"So I told them," he answered, "but neither for love nor money can I induce one of them to stir. If we were in France, I should know better what to do; for love or courtesy, if not for money, I do believe a Frenchman would do his utmost to oblige you, but these Rhine Germans are different, there is very little of the chivalrous element in their composition," he added, rather bitterly.

"Then there is nothing for it but to stay here all night?" Edith said, with rather a rueful sort of smile.

"Nothing indeed; I hope you will believe me when I say that it is *impossible* for you to get back to Bonn now; even if the men would venture across, *you* could not. In an hour's time it will be quite dark, and there is no hope of the storm abating before then. And not even the most absolute necessity for your reaching Bonn to-night would be excuse enough for me, if I allowed you to embark in an open

boat in such weather, let alone the utter improbability of your finding any kind of conveyance on the other side. It would be sheer madness to think of such a thing ; your father would never forgive me."

Even in that moment of anxiety and annoyance, Edith was too innately truthful to let the last observation pass unchallenged.

"Mr. Wentworth is not my father," she said, quietly.

"Indeed," exclaimed Harry Neville, looking rather astonished, "I beg your pardon, I thought of course it was so," and he stopped a little confused. His first natural impression was that if not her father, he was at least her stepfather, and he thought she had chosen a strange moment for giving him such an unnecessary piece of information.

There was an awkward silence, but Edith did not enlighten him further, and her cousin was too much of a gentleman to show, by word or look, any impertinent curiosity on the subject.

“Then I suppose I must make up my mind to what cannot be helped,” Miss Vivian said presently, with a half sigh. “There is no other possible way of getting over, you are sure?”

“None whatever, I have made all possible inquiries, but they are quite fruitless. I am so sorry about it, I assure you,” he added, rather pained by her tone of mistrust; “*do* believe that I have done all I can to help you.”

Edith raised her head, and turned her beautiful eyes full upon him. “Indeed I do believe and know that you have been all that is most kind,” she said very gracefully and frankly. “I am quite ashamed to find that I, the foolish cause of this misadventure, can stand questioning you in this way. You must not think me so ungrateful as I seem.”

It was a dangerous speech for her to make, and at any other time would have provoked an answer by word or look which would have made those dark eyes drop very

quickly behind the safe shelter of their lashes. But Harry Neville felt himself to be so strong then and there, that he could afford to be merciful, and only the sudden flush of colour in his cheek showed the real pleasure which her words had given him. “I have one other thing to suggest,” he said; “the landlord tells me that there is a large party weather-bound somewhere among the hills. They started it seems while we were at Nonnenwerth, and he expects them back as soon as the storm abates. Of course they will be obliged to spend the night here also, so it will be best for you to secure a good room while you can.”

“And you too,” said Edith, laughing, “this little hotel does not boast of many such I should think.”

“Oh, I can wait,” he answered carelessly. “There are ladies in the party, and they must be served first. I daresay they will manage to give me a shakedown somewhere. I am an old campaigner and can sleep under all difficulties. In the mean-

time, while you are looking at your room, shall I order supper to be ready for you against you come back?"

All he could do he could not help a certain quiver of the lips as he asked the question, and Edith all but laughed outright ; there was something so irresistibly comic in the idea of the *tête-à-tête* supper between these two which his words had conjured up.

"Oh, *must* I have supper?" she asked, in an imploring tone ; "indeed, I do not think I could eat anything."

"Well, then, perhaps I will let you off *supper*," he answered, laughing ; "but a cup of hot coffee you must take ; nay, I insist, or I will not insure you against an attack of ague or rheumatic fever to-morrow, after the drenching rain upon that pier."

"A cup of coffee then let it be," said Edith, as she ran upstairs.

What is there about some men that makes them always succeed in getting their own way, without appearing exactly dictatorial ? which, by the way, I am afraid Captain

Neville was, in some degree, in this case ; but then it was all for the lady's good.

Miss Vivian was not sorry for a few quiet moments in her own room, before it could be considered incumbent upon her to make her appearance downstairs again ; and she naturally began thinking over the events of the afternoon, and the strange combination of circumstances which had led to her present uncomfortable situation. The whole affair was certainly unfortunate ; but it was a consolation to think that it might have been worse. Brave and independent as she was, she could not bring herself to contemplate with cheerfulness the idea of having been left at Königswinter quite alone. And had she had to choose a companion for herself, instead of having one thus thrust upon her unasked, she could not help acknowledging that she would sooner have had Captain Neville's society than that of any other unmarried gentleman of her acquaintance. She trusted so thoroughly to his genuine politeness and innate gentlemanlike feeling ;

neither did she feel the slightest fear that here, on the banks of the Rhine, or hereafter in club-rooms or at mess tables, would there be, thanks to him, any unfair laugh raised at her expense. And this last was no small proof of confidence, let me add. More than once she congratulated herself that Arthur Fitzgerald, good natured as she knew him to be, had not been left behind instead of his friend. After all, was he not her own cousin,—her guardian's son,—the very proper person of all others to be the companion of such an untoward adventure, if companion she must have. And then Miss Edith Vivian, in the silence and solitude of her own room, came to a most wise and praiseworthy resolution, namely, that when she went down stairs again she would take the very first possible opportunity of telling him of their relationship; and then, of course, there would at once be an end to all awkward feeling between them; probably, indeed, they would spend a very pleasant evening together after that,

and in the morning the whole story should be repeated to the rest of the party, and Mr. Wentworth's self-reproaches for ever set at rest. She even got so far as to settle what she should say; something to this effect: "I told you just now that Mr. Wentworth was not my father; but I did not tell you what my name was. Shall I tell you now? I think you ought to know it," etc. etc.

All very pretty and proper no doubt; but this, as I say, was resolved in the solitude of her own room. Not without certain misgivings, for she felt even then that it was one thing to purpose such a resolution and quite another to carry it out; and she knew, by experience, that her courage would begin to fail in a most provoking way when the time came to act. Still, she was really brave at heart, and it was her firm *intention* to do what was right. But ever since the time when a certain unwieldy, and not over courteous philosopher made little cynical speeches over Mrs. Thrale's tea-table, we have been told what place is said to be

‘paved with good intentions.’ A more modern writer has wisely added, that if paved with good intentions, it might, with equal truth, be said to be ‘roofed with lost opportunities.’ Edith had had an opportunity of telling her cousin ‘all about it’ a little while before, such an one as she could not hope to have again. When she had disclaimed relationship with Mr. Wentworth, nothing would have been easier (in theory) than to have added, “My name is Edith Vivian; I think you must have heard it before.” It was a golden opportunity, but she had let it slip through her fingers; and Fortune, womanlike, was provoked to find her favours so lightly appreciated, and for the rest of the evening was against her, as we shall presently see.

CHAPTER II.

MISS VIVIAN did not know how long she had been sitting in her sober reverie, when she was aroused by the sound of a heavy carriage stopping at the door of the hotel. Then ensued a great noise of talking and laughter, much jingling of the harness, and many angry expostulations from the driver to his horses, before the occupiers of the carriage were suffered to alight; while all this time these latter kept up a sort of running fire of explanations, in very bad German to the landlord, (who happened to be a Frenchman,) from which Edith gathered that the carriage in question was what is called in German a ‘Gelegenheit,’ in plain English ‘opportunity,’ namely, one which

they had found at some other place, about to return to Königswinter. Without doubt, then, this was the party the landlord had spoken of as being weather-bound somewhere among the seven mountains. Evidently, it was a large and merry one ; and Edith, in her new character of unprotected female, had no fancy to meet the new comers on the stairs ; so, from a snug corner of her window, she watched the crazy old vehicle disembark its freight of living creatures ; which process caused a good deal more noise and shrieking laughter, for it seemed that they had been very closely packed. Then the noise outside was followed by, if possible, a greater amount of noise inside the house. There was a sound of voices, and of many persons hurrying to and fro along the corridor outside her room. She heard some loud and uncomplimentary remarks upon the small size of the rooms and style of the accommodation, which showed that the party just arrived were about to take up their abode at the Hôtel de Berlin for the night ; and

after these sounds had ceased, she heard an order given, in a gentleman's voice, for a substantial supper to be immediately prepared for seven persons. Edith thought she had good cause to thank Captain Neville for the hint which had enabled her to secure a room for herself in good time.

When the confusion had a little subsided, she found, by application to her watch, that it was already past nine o'clock ; so, waiting a few moments longer until she thought the new comers would be settled for the time being in their own apartments, she walked quietly downstairs to the public room, where she expected to find her companion awaiting her. But she was either too early or too late to escape all observation. As she entered, she perceived that Captain Neville was standing in the middle of the room, conversing with a middle-aged lady, whose back was turned towards her. She was a person whose appearance was rather 'would be' stylish than strictly ladylike ; and in the hasty glance which Edith bestowed upon

her in passing, her quick eye detected that she was a little more smartly dressed than the occasion warranted. Miss Vivian passed on quietly into a second kind of garden room opening on to a verandah, which was much in request in fine weather; not, however, as she had hoped without attracting the attention of the lady in question. A meaning glance shot at Henry Neville, which, by means of a looking-glass at the other end of the room, Edith intercepted, and a whisper, which was not so low but that its purport reached her ear, told her, much to her annoyance, that she had become the subject of that lady's conversation. Finding that the rain was almost over, she went at once on to the balcony, so as to be beyond earshot, and there waited quietly until her companion should join her. From where she stood, through a vista of open windows and doors, she could see what was passing without being seen; and she could not help laughing when, in her occasional glances in the direction of the speakers, she

noted the signs of increasing impatience on her cousin's face ; and saw how, within the limits of good breeding, he made every possible effort to release himself from the durance vile in which he was very evidently being held. But his captor was merciless, she talked *at* him with great volubility, for what seemed a very long time. At last she turned to take her departure ; but, as she did so, she laid her hand upon her victim's arm, and said, in a voice which Edith fancied was purposely raised, " Ah, Master Harry, you are a sad boy ; you always were, you know ; but you must promise me to think over what he told me to tell you, or else,—" and then there was a glance in the direction where Edith was standing, and the rest of the sentence was lost in another meaning whisper.

Edith flushed up to the temples, for she was certain that the last words contained some allusion to herself ; but she had to control the annoyance she felt, for the lady was gone, and Captain Neville was coming

slowly through the garden-room towards the balcony, looking excessively provoked and decidedly cross. It was an expression she had never before seen on his handsome face; but one which, nevertheless, was sometimes to be seen there, for if the truth must be told, that “sad boy,” Master Harry, in spite of many other amiable and estimable qualities, was possessed of what is technically termed a ‘temper of his own.’ Now we all know that the temper thus spoken of, does not mean a good one, and I am afraid that such things had been known as for Captain Neville to be afflicted with a fit of the sulks for half an hour, or even an hour together. Longer than this, however, thanks to Christian principle and a thoroughly kind heart, they had seldom been known to endure; and all things considered, the said temper was, in general, kept wonderfully under control, so that it must have been a more than ordinary provocation which, in the present instance, had so far ruffled his equanimity as to induce

him to mutter, as he stepped on to the verandah, “I declare it’s enough to provoke a saint.”

He hardly knew that he had spoken aloud, until Edith asked, with a quiet smile, “May I ask what it is that has been enough to provoke *you* just now?”

He was not proof against her soft voice and sly smile; besides, he had no cause to be angry with her, and Harry Neville, unlike many hasty people, was sometimes capable of being ‘just before he was generous’ in the distribution of his ill-humour. His brow cleared in an instant, and he turned half aside as he answered, with a careless laugh,

“What? Why, to see the stars shining as they are shining now, when it is quite too late to dream of our getting away. Is not that cause sufficient?”

And, true enough, as if in mockery of their misfortunes, overhead and around, the eternal stars were shining as though there had been no such things as storm or rain throughout the day that was just over.

Miss Vivian laughed too. Very well turned, she thought, but you shall not escape so easily. "It is provoking, certainly," she said, "but they have only just come out, and I do not think," she added demurely, "that you could have seen them, from the place where you were standing with your friend."

"Don't call that odious woman my friend," he interrupted pettishly.

"I beg your pardon, I thought you seemed to know her."

"Know her? Yes, so I do, and have known her ever since I was as high as that table; she lives close to my father's place, in Gloucestershire. But don't call her my friend, for all that. Friendship, to my mind, involves something more than mere length of acquaintance."

"I quite agree with you," said Edith quietly, and then there was a long pause.

"How sharp you are!" said Captain Neville presently, with a sort of comical detected look. "You know you did not in the least believe what I told you about the

stars. And you were quite right, too ; they had nothing to do with my ill-temper, poor things. How beautiful they are though, are they not ?”

Edith had taken her seat beside one of the little tables placed on the balcony for the accommodation of visitors, and he was leaning over the balustrade of the verandah. The stars did look beautiful, indeed, and the full August moon, like some tender spirit returning good for evil, after struggling through the dense clouds which had striven to obscure her brightness, had left the edges of the dark mass from which she had just emerged radiant with silver light. A little harmless summer lightning still played about, near the horizon. “The trees were busy with the past showers,” to use the poet’s graceful expression. All nature seemed to breathe new life after the refreshing influence of the storm.

“ Do you care to hear what it really was, that put me out of temper just now ?” Harry Neville asked rather abruptly, still leaning

over the balustrade, with his face turned partly away from his companion.

“Not unless you quite care to tell me,” she answered.

“I do care to tell you, if you can bear to listen. It would do me good. I feel as if I ought to make some such confession, partly as a penance, but more as a safety-valve,” he said with a forced laugh. “If Fitz were here, I should inflict the tale upon that much-enduring man. But there, what a selfish creature I am, to bore you in this way about myself,” he added moodily.

“Do tell me; I do care to hear,” Edith said after a moment’s pause, and both her words and tone were sympathizing. “I may even have something to tell you in return,” she added in a lower tone. If she had only formed a remote guess at the nature of the coming confession, and how it would give the death-blow to all her previously-formed good resolutions, how very far she would have been from thus encouraging him to make it.

“So be it, then, thanks to your kindness ; but I have a question to ask you first, and you must promise to give me a true answer.” He was leaning with his head on his hands as he said this, his face still partially turned away. “Tell me honestly, what do you think of a man, if he can be called a man, who loves money so much, that he has no room in his heart for any other love ; a man who could barter away his life and independence, and all the better feelings and affections of his nature for the sake of becoming rich ; a man who could, in fact, sell himself body and soul, for this life at any rate, by marrying a woman of whom he knows little and cares less, just forsooth because she happens to be a wealthy heiress ? Tell me, if you have patience to do so, what you think of a man like that ?”

Here was a home thrust, and no mistake. Edith did not answer just directly, but not for want of words or ideas upon the subject. When she did speak, a certain flashing in her eye and a peculiar steadiness in her

voice showed that it was one which had been well weighed in her mind.

“I think”—and then she paused—“I don’t like to say quite *what* I think, for fear of saying too much, because I happen to feel rather strongly on that subject; but I believe such a man would not have to wait long before reaping the fruits of what he had sown. His own future life would be punishment enough, I should think, if feeling and conscience had not quite ceased to do their work.”

“And you think me the sort of man to do it?” he asked abruptly.

“O no, indeed, I did not mean that—the last person!” she exclaimed.

He had taken her by surprise with the question, and she started up from her seat as she spoke. If it had been to save her life, she could hardly have helped the movement, or the frank avowal which accompanied it; nor when she made it, was she thinking of his own words, overheard on that first night of their acquaintance, in his

conversation with Fitzgerald. They might unconsciously have given a colouring to her convictions, but she judged him, as she thought, by what she had seen and heard during the last three days. Three days! was it possible that it was only three days since she first saw him?—it seemed as if she had known him for half a lifetime. His face was turned full upon her now, a face radiant with happiness; the cloud which had been there for the last few minutes quite gone.

“I know you did not mean it,” he said in a low tone; “but I shall thank you all my life through, for those last kind words. I needed some such assurance to help me to regain my own self-respect. It would not have been strange, though, if you had thought otherwise, for even my own father believes it possible that I could become such a fortune-hunter as I have described.”

Edith began to have a faint suspicion of what was coming now, and would have stopped him if she could, but it was too

late; he went on without looking at her again.

“He has taken it into his head that, as the younger son of a poor man, my duty to the rest of the family is to ‘marry money,’ as he calls it; and he has chalked out a neat little plan for the furtherance of this worthy object. Indeed, he has the heiress ready for me in his mind’s eye; the same rich cousin I told you about the other day; but I dare say you do not remember. She happens to be a ward of my father’s, which makes the matter still more pleasant and honourable in a social point of view. There are unfortunately, however, two drawbacks to his pet scheme,—the one, that I do not know the lady, and the other, that I have strong objections to the whole affair, and have proved more refractory than he expected. I do believe he loves me better than any one else in the world, and he has always been a kind father to me, and yet,” he added still more bitterly, “the only message he could send me from a sick bed, when this manœuvring old woman

I have met to-night came away from home, was to the effect that, if I had any regard for his wishes, I was to lose no time or opportunity of making up to my cousin, should I chance to meet her while I am abroad. In fact, I believe I am expected to go back to Aix-la-Chapelle, for that express purpose; I, who would sooner go to the other end of Europe to get out of her way. Such a message as that from a sick father was enough to try a man's temper, don't you think so?" And a certain unsteadiness in his voice showed how deeply his pride or his affections had been hurt.

He paused for a moment, and Edith, crimson to the very temples, and with her heart beating very fast, made a desperate attempt to stop him.

"Please don't tell me any more," she said as calmly as she could, "I don't think you ought. You will be sorry some day, perhaps, that you have told me so much."

He was a little surprised, and would have

been still more so if he could have seen her face; but he was leaning over the balustrade, playing impatiently with a little cane he held in his hand, and so did not notice her agitation. Of course he thought she meant to say that he had no right to speak in such a way of his father to a stranger.

“Perhaps you are right,” he said presently in a moody tone; “indeed, I believe you are; and, at any rate, I have no earthly business to inflict my private troubles upon you in this way. But you will allow that it was hard, when I went up to speak to Mrs. Rivers just now, anxiously expecting to hear some news of my father—(I believe I should have kept well out of her way if it had not been for that)—to find that she had no word or message for me beyond what I have told you.”

Snap went the little ivory-headed cane. It had been bent and twisted in his hands beyond all endurance.

“There,” he said, as he threw the broken pieces away from him, “I have done mis-

chief enough for one night ; though I might have chosen something better to vent my ill-humour upon, than my poor brother's last gift when we parted in India."

He raised his head, and was turning away from the balcony, when he caught sight of his companion's face.

" How pale you are !" he exclaimed, startled into speaking quite abruptly ; " what is the matter ? Cold, too ; you are absolutely shivering. How could I be so thoughtless as to keep you standing so long out here ? the night-air is damp after the storm."

It was quite true ; the colour which a few moments before had dyed her cheek and neck, had as suddenly disappeared, and now in the pale moonlight she looked as white as a marble statue ; and she was shivering or trembling from head to foot, but less from cold than from nervous excitement, and from actual fear of the painful disclosures which might yet be in store for her.

" I am a little cold, not very," she said, trying to smile in answer to his anxious

looks. It is very silly of me to be trembling like this, but I think I am a little overdone and tired. It has been a long day. Perhaps if I could have that cup of coffee you talked about just now, it would do me good ; and then, after a night's rest, I shall be quite well to-morrow."

No, Edith Vivian, not quite well. It would not be quite well with you to-morrow, nor for many more long days, and you knew it, too, whatever you might say. Not again could your conscience or your heart be at ease, so long as they were burdened by that humiliating secret which you would have given the world now never to have known, or to have confessed as soon as it *was* known. He had made it impossible to do so then, much as she wished to tell him of the relationship in which they stood to each other. The love of truth was strong within her, but just then the woman's pride was stronger still. He should know it all sooner or later, of that she was resolved. She would ask Mr.

Wentworth to tell him as soon as ever they were all together again. Anything was better than to go on in this miserable deceitful way ; but not when he had just told her of the scheme which had been so cunningly devised against her, could she make up her mind to tell him that she was the identical rich cousin who was to play the part of victim in the plot. She had not courage enough to do this. For that night he had effectually sealed her lips ; but none the less did she feel crushed and humbled on account of the secrecy and silence she was compelled to maintain.

When Captain Neville returned from his expedition in quest of the coffee, he found her sitting still at the table in the verandah, with her head leaning on her hands, looking very disconsolate indeed, and but a very faded reflection of the brilliant Edith Vivian who had left Bonn in his company that morning. He began a few remonstrances upon what he deemed her imprudence in remaining in the damp atmosphere. But she

urged the exceeding pleasantness of the evening air after the sultry heat of the day; and he was compelled to rest satisfied with her assurances that she was not in the least cold now. Still he kept watching her at intervals, looking furtively at her with an anxious puzzled expression. And Edith, noticing this, roused herself to talk again in her own naturally animated tone.

“Was that Mrs. Marmaduke Rivers you were talking to just now?” she asked.

“Yes. Do you know her?”

“Only by reputation,” said Edith, her lips quivering with a scarcely suppressed smile.

“Oh, how delighted she would be to hear you say that,” he said, laughing, but speaking in the same low tone that she had adopted. “Notoriety is, to her, as the food she lives upon, the air she breathes; she would rather be talked about in any way, I believe, than not at all.”

“You are pleased to be severe, Captain Neville!”

“Am I? Yes; well, I suppose I am; but that ancient she-dragon has been a sort of *bête noire* to me ever since I can recollect, and you should not have asked me to sketch her character, just when she has provoked me more outrageously than usual.”

“I don’t think I did ask you to sketch it; did I?” said Edith, mischievously.

“Didn’t you,” he answered, laughing. “If you did not, you led me on to do it by speaking of her, which is much the same thing; for talking to me on the subject of Mrs. Marmaduke Rivers has much the same effect as dropping sparks upon dry gunpowder; I’m sure to go off!”

“Is she travelling with any of her family, or with friends?” asked Edith. “All her daughters are married, are they not?”

“Yes; but she has one of them with her now—the youngest—who made a run-away match last year with Captain Forsyth of our corps. Of course, one can’t approve of such affairs, on principle, but if ever a girl had an excuse for eloping, poor little Fanny

Rivers had. I don't believe a more amiable or better-disposed girl ever lived, and I have pitied her ever since I can remember, for being compelled to be the witness and the partner of her mother's affectations and vulgarities ; for she is innately vulgar in thought, word, and deed, though she does not use flagrantly bad grammar, or get into trouble with her aspirations. Fanny saw each of her sisters, one after the other, made miserable by being sacrificed to the pomps and vanities of this world ; and when her turn came, and the brilliant future which her mother had in view for her was made fully clear to her young mind, the little lady proved more refractory than was expected. Unluckily, too, or luckily, as I suppose she thinks, she and Charlie Forsyth had taken a fancy to each other some time before. At first he had been warmly encouraged by the maternal authority, but was thrown over in that quarter, when higher game came in view. Only the young couple did not seem to see it, as the saying is ; and, so after an

enforced separation of some duration and a good deal of domestic persecution, one fine morning Miss Fanny was missing, and a neat little note found on Mamma's dressing-table to tell her the reason why. I don't think she will have much cause to regret it, as far as her future happiness is concerned, for she will have a kind husband, poor girl, if Charlie is the same good fellow he used to be when I knew him as a youngster."

"I suppose, then, that they have made it up with Mrs. Rivers, by this time, if they are travelling together?"

"Oh, yes, that was all arranged within a couple of months. Poor little Fanny nearly broke her heart at the thought of what she had done, as soon as it was over, and wrote such penitent and imploring letters back to her mother, that Mrs. Rivers—who really has a kind heart, I believe, though she does not often let it come into play, and is very fond of Fanny into the bargain—could not resist her appeals for forgiveness; and the Forsyths have been

staying at her house almost ever since. Besides, too, as I said before, she lives upon notoriety, and Fanny's grand *coup* brought her so much of this, that, in common gratitude, she could not feel angry for long, with the young lady who was the cause of it."

"You are pleased to be *satirical* now, Captain Neville."

"Upon my honour I am only telling you the truth. • At least—

"I know not how the case may be;
I tell the tale as 'twas told to me,

for I was not in England at the time it happened; but I have heard that for six whole months afterwards you could not please the old lady better, than by talking and condoling with her on the subject of Fanny's elopement. But there, do let us talk of something else. I have said ill-natured things enough for one night at least. I wonder who it was that first perpetrated that famous saying, 'that it is safer to talk of things than of persons'? Whoever it was, he deserves to have a statue erected to his memory."

“ I don’t think I ever heard,” answered Edith, “ or if I have, I have forgotten ; perhaps nobody ever exactly said it first, but it grew to be a saying out of the very nature of things. At least it has become now familiar as a household word. We owe the story of the two wallets to some wise old Grecian, do we not ?”

“ What is that ?”

“ Don’t you know ? oh, then I think I must not tell you, for it would seem too much as if I were condemning you for a fault which I am constantly falling into myself.”

“ The story of the two wallets, if you please !” said Harry Neville, listening with an air of the deepest attention.

“ Well, if you will have it ; but it scarcely deserves to be called a story. It is more an illustration of Seneca’s, or some other such sage old philosopher. He said ‘ that every man carried two wallets, one on his back, and the other in front of him. The one in front he keeps for the faults of others ; the one behind for his own.’ ”

“Very good, and though the offspring of a heathen brain, it savours much of the Christian charity of which we are told, that it hides a multitude of sins. I stand rebuked too, though I acquit you of all intention of rebuking me, not only for my censoriousness, but also for ignorance, for I don’t think I ever heard the saying before, to my knowledge. You are a classical scholar, I see, and have perhaps added the dead languages to your other accomplishments.”

“Oh, no, pray don’t try to make me out such a learned lady!” exclaimed Edith, laughing merrily, for she was fast recovering her spirits; “the dead languages are indeed dead to me, for I don’t know a word of Greek, and only a very few words of Latin, not quite enough to make out an epitaph or a prescription; and what you call my classical lore, is only second-hand after all. That story of the two wallets I read, as a child, in a book which lays no claim to be called classical, though it is a good one in its way,—‘Mason on Self-Knowledge.’”

“You stand acquitted, then, on that for-

midable count," said Harry Neville, answering her in the same light tone. "But you need not have been in such haste to deny the soft impeachment. The days are past, and a happy thing too, when a woman was considered to lose caste in society and degrade herself to the rank of a blue-stocking, if she ventured to indulge her literary taste by reading anything of a higher tone than a cookery book or a novel. And may I venture to add, that I should judge you to be one who would avail yourself to the utmost of the freedom thus granted to your sex, now that such irrational and narrow-minded prejudices are at an end."

"Perhaps so," she answered, "only unfortunately in the good old times, when I was young, it was not the fashion to teach little girls Greek and algebra, and so my education was sadly neglected. I am too old to begin now, I am afraid."

"Not too old, I should say; but old enough at least to know whether you feel inclined to begin or no."

“But what was it we were talking about just now, before I was so suddenly taken classical,” interrupted Edith, finding the conversation again becoming unpleasantly personal. “Oh, I remember, our neighbours, faults and short-comings.”

“What a universal failing censoriousness is, to be sure,” said Captain Neville; “not even the kindest-hearted persons are quite exempt from it. I believe it is innate in every human heart.”

“Innate as the sin which is born with us and clings to us through life,” said Edith, thoughtfully.

“Yes, and as difficult to root out; even those who are most in earnest in their efforts to conquer it, find they have to keep up the struggle to the end of their lives. I suppose there is a kind of malicious satisfaction to our own mind, in finding out the weak points of others, which gives a zest to the habit. Good people have given us many wholesome pieces of advice upon the subject, but I doubt if the spirit of such is

often remembered, even though the words may be."

"For instance, that when we are tempted to think of one fault of another's, we should think of two of our own," suggested Edith.

"Yes, and then there is another which I have read somewhere, about the three sieves, Is it true? Is it kind? Is it necessary? through which our idle words and censures of others should be made to pass before we allow them to be spoken. But, as I said before, although we remember the quaint aphorism, I am afraid we sift our words but little more for the advice. No, I am still inclined to think my first favourite maxim, about the safety of talking of things rather than persons the best of all;—partly, I suppose, on the principle of prevention being better than cure."

"And yet," said Edith, "there must be times just now and then, when for the sake of justice, or of warning, it may seem to be our duty deliberately to speak hard

things of others, and then, surely it cannot be wrong to do so ; it is difficult to decide sometimes in such cases.”

“ There I think the three sieves would help us. If we can prove to the satisfaction of our own consciences that the hard things are neither untrue, unkind, nor unnecessary, then we may be sure that they are spoken in the spirit of Christian charity and not in that of self-righteousness. It is the idle words uttered without thought that we need to be afraid of. But there I am, preaching again. I beg your pardon I am sure for being so exceedingly prosy ; what must you think of me ? I was talking far more at myself, however, than at you.”

“ Perhaps it would be as well if we all talked at our ourselves more upon this matter, for I quite agree with you that censoriousness is a universal fault,” said Edith rising as she spoke.

The cup, or rather cups of coffee, seemed to have taken a most unusual time to discuss, but at last they were finished and she

had not a shadow of excuse for remaining longer on the balcony with her companion. She looked at her watch, and found to her surprise that it was ten o'clock.

“ You will like to start by an early boat to-morrow morning ? ” Captain Neville asked.

“ Oh yes ! if you please, as early as possible,” said Edith, half angry with herself the moment after for having shown so much eagerness.

The list of boats was consulted, and the earliest boat but one fixed upon to take them to Bonn, the first having been found to start at some unearthly hour, almost before day-break. Still Edith lingered, looking nervously through the open window and door of the “ *Garten Saal* ” into the *table d'hôte* room beyond, where the noisy supper party could just be discerned.

“ Does that Mrs. Rivers know anything of my being left here ? ” she asked in a hesitating tone, and with a bright blush, which, thanks to the dim light, her com-

panion could not see. I should think from your description, she would be likely to concern herself with my affairs more than would be quite agreeable."

"I was obliged to tell her something about it," he answered apologetically. "Indeed she had heard it before I saw her, and asked me directly if I was the gentleman who had been left behind on the pier with a young lady? These hotel people will gossip, and so I thought it better to tell her the truth."

Edith did not answer at once; she remembered the look Mrs. Rivers had given her when she came through the *table d'hôte* room to the verandah, and she did not care to run the gauntlet of the many curious eyes which would be turned upon her if she ventured to pass through that room again now; neither did she wish to wait till the supper was over, which from all appearance it would not be for some time to come.

"Do you think—" she began, and then she

stopped, not knowing exactly what to say.

But he guessed in a moment what she wished. "I think," he said with a very reassuring laugh, "that you can go into the house quite well by the garden if you are not afraid, or, if you would prefer it, through that door in the garden room. See, it is open now, and leads into the entrance hall, the same as the other does. I will just go in and speak to my old friend, Fanny Forsyth, whom I have not seen since her marriage, and I promise you, that in the meantime you shall escape quite quietly, without running any risk of attracting the lynx eyes of that old—"

"Take care what you say!" said Edith, holding up her finger with a merry smile.

"You see I am incorrigible," exclaimed Harry. "However, I was only going to call her a Catamaran this time," and then they shook hands and she wished him good night.

CHAPTER III.

EARLY as the boat was announced to start on the following morning, Miss Edith Vivian was up and dressed nearly an hour before the time. For once in a way she had not slept well. Tired, excited, a little vexed (but not so much so as by all the rules of propriety she ought to have been) at the events of the past day, she had indulged in the very questionable habit of 'thinking' after she had gone to bed. And so the result had been that she had lain restless for several hours, and woke, as is often the case after such involuntary vigils, at an early hour the next morning, feeling not exactly refreshed, but very wide awake. When dressed, she took her seat by the

window, with a little German Testament in her hand, which she had been rejoiced the night before to see lying on the table in her bedroom, not an uncommon sight now in foreign hotels. She meant to occupy herself with this till the time came for her to start. From the window where she was sitting, she could see for some distance up the stately Rhine, and she knew the boat would be in sight some five or ten minutes before it could reach Königswinter pier. She opened the little volume in her hand, and turned to the closing chapters of St. John's Gospel, to that beautiful discourse of our Saviour's, which is so doubly touching when looked upon as his last legacy to his beloved disciples, just before the bitter parting in the garden of Gethsemane. She found in the well known words, as many another has done, fresh meaning and beauty, reading them as she did now in the unfamiliar language of a foreign tongue. One verse in particular in the fourteenth chapter of St. John, came home to her with new and

greater power of attraction. “I will not leave you comfortless, I will come unto you.” The words in the German version are rendered, “I will not leave you orphans.” Spiritual as she knew the meaning of the term to be, Edith could not help feeling that for her, an orphan indeed, the promise as it stood thus, couched in words of such deep tenderness, had a new and peculiar charm. The Father of the Fatherless had been very merciful to her ; through long years of lonely orphanhood the everlasting arms had been underneath and around her, and God’s love had kept her safe from bitter sorrow, or from unrepented sin. He had raised up to her true and loving friends ; He had given her health and riches, and, best of all, work ; work to do in this world for others, rather than herself, the surest and most unfailing source of contentment, nay of cheerfulness. More than this, He had given her a keen enjoyment of life, such as she could not have believed to be possible when on that sad day, not so many

years before, she had stood, poor loving child, beside an open grave, and had heard with a pang of speechless agony the thrilling words, “earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust,” spoken over the mother whom she had loved with all the intense earnestness of her nature.

“Edith, my own precious child,” that mother had said to her, almost with her dying breath, “you must not rebel. I know how hard it is to submit, but you must try, my own ; you must try. Some day you will learn to feel that even to be alone in the world is best, if God wills it be so. My darling, you must not repine ; ‘He will not leave you comfortless.’” And the words had come true. She was no longer comfortless, though often sad and lonely ; for in taking away her earthly stays, the friend of friends had but taught her to lean more entirely on His own perfect strength, and had blessed her with the fulness of His own great love, before which all earthly love grows faint and feeble. No, she would not

repine, for the promise had been faithfully fulfilled. She was “not an orphan now, for *He* had come unto her.”

She was still thinking over these things, when there came a low knock at the door of her room. At first she did not hear it, but when the knock had been repeated, and she had answered, “Herein,” the door opened, and a clumsy but honest-looking German girl made her appearance, carrying a tray, on which was set early breakfast “for one,” in the shape of coffee and “Zwiebacks.”*

Edith could scarcely help laughing, for she recognized her cousin’s handiwork in the polite attention, even before the girl began to explain that the gentleman had told her overnight to be sure and bring it to the “Fräulein” as soon as she was dressed. Captain Neville’s one idea on the subject of refreshment seemed to be a “hot cup of coffee;” however, it was not

* A kind of rusk, or biscuit.

a bad idea, and it was very kind of him to have thought of her.

The kindness and the coffee were equally acceptable, and our heroine felt the better for both. She kept the rather uncouth waiting-maid to talk to her while she drank the coffee, delighting the girl's heart by asking her questions about her birth, parentage, and education, about the old folks at home, and many other subjects which readily suggest themselves to one who, like Edith, was in the habit of conversing in a spirit of kind sympathy with those poorer than herself. In return she had to listen to rather an overpowering stream of eloquence, which was largely interspersed with such exclamations as 'Ja wohl,' 'ich glaub,' and 'wunderschön ;' but Miss Vivian was a very fair German scholar, and managed to understand the greater part of the information the girl was nothing loth to impart.

She had come from a cottage on the banks of the Lahn, near Ems, did the lady know that part? but she had not always

lived there: at first she had lived with her father in the village of Friedrichsdorf, near Friedburg, in Hesse Homburg, where a colony of French silk mercers had taken up their abode a great many years ago, when some cruel king had chased them out of their own country because they were Protestants. Had the lady ever heard the story?

Edith, putting this and that together, and upon the strength of having heard or read somewhere that after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, by Louis XIV., a little company from amongst the many thousands of exiled Huguenots had made their way to a village in the neighbourhood of the baths of Homburg, and had lived there ever since, said she thought she *had* heard the story. “Were her father and mother both living?” she asked.

“Yes, both alive; but”—

And then the girl’s eyes began to glisten, and Edith grew more and more interested as she told her simple tale of how the good

God had seen fit to visit the little cottage by the Lahn with sorrow and sickness. The father, the bread-winner of the family, had been struck down in the midst of his work. He had fallen from a ladder one day in the previous spring, and broken his leg, and then had been laid up for a long time. He was better now, and able to do a little work ; but there was a heavy doctor's bill, and so it had been settled that Lieschen—that was herself—who had never been away from home before, should go out into the world, and earn a little money to help pay off the debts that had been incurred before the winter came. That was how she came to be at Königswinter. She did not like it much. Her family had kept the old Huguenot faith pure through many generations, and she was the only Protestant among her Roman Catholic fellow-servants, who despised and laughed at her for her different religion. And they missed her so much at home ; the mother had not been quite well for a great many years, and Lieschen would

have liked much better to have been with her, to save her work and trouble. She had been here two months already, and was to stay one month longer, and then she would have earned all the money that was wanted, ten florins more, and would go home again; and she should be so glad, so very glad. And the poor girl's eyes glistered more than ever, and her stout rough hand brushed away a tear, that showed she was not very happy now.

“How much longer had she to stay?”
Edith asked.

“A month or nearly six weeks more.”

“And if she left at once, how much money would she lose?”

“Ten florins. They paid her well,” she said. “She would have been so glad if it had been possible to go back next week, for there was a friend going that way who would have taken care of her, and mother wanted her very much, she knew. But it was of no use going till she had earned the rest of the money; she must wait patiently till

the time was ended. There was no help for it."

Yes, there was help for it, nearer than you thought, poor Lieschen, for Edith's heart was on fire with a generous impulse such as the simple Huguenot girl had never dreamed of kindling. Even while she was speaking, Edith was feeling for her ever ready purse; and now she put the coveted golden piece, for which the poor girl would have had to work for another month, far away from her sick parents, and in an atmosphere of danger to her faith, into her hand, with something more for herself, and with an injunction to make good haste back to the Lahn with her friend next week. It was a foolish thing to do, some would-be-wise persons might say—a great risk; but it does not do to be always cautious in this world. Honesty was written on every line of Lieschen's face, and Edith's experience had made her a tolerable physiognomist.

It was worth something to see the look of blank and bewildered astonishment with

which the gift was received. It certainly had never been expected. At first she stared at the giver with eyes and mouth wide open, till Edith all but laughed outright. But presently the light dawned, as it were, upon the girl's mind, and she began to understand. She did not say much even then, but slowly, one by one, the big tears of gratitude came rolling down her cheeks.

“How good, how kind ; nobody had ever been so kind to her before. Oh, how she prayed the good God would always bless the sweet English lady through her whole life, and make her very happy. If there was but some little thing she could do for her in return—some little thing she could give her—so that, perhaps, at any time if the Fräulein were unhappy, it might remind her of how kind she had been to poor Lieschen, and that would do her good. Her eye fell upon the Testament which was still in Edith's hand. If that was not too small, if the lady would accept that, she would be

so very glad. It was her very own ; she had bought it as a child with her saved-up money ; and she had put it on the table there last night on purpose, because she had been told that the English people were good Protestants, and loved God's holy book, and she had been so sorry for the poor young lady who had been left there all alone."

Edith made the girl feel very happy by willingly accepting her gift. To use Carlyle's words, it would be a 'curious memento of many things,' in future times, she thought. But Lieschen's expressions of gratitude were brought to an abrupt conclusion by the sound of the first bell on the pier, which announced that the steamer for Bonn had just come in sight. The girl fled from the room without even staying to wish Miss Vivian good-bye. Edith thought this a little odd, but she had no time to waste in conjectures as to the reason. She was soon arrayed in hat and cloak, and then went downstairs to find Captain Neville waiting for her at the foot

of the landing. His morning greeting and inquiries after her health were given in a quiet sort of matter-of-fact way, which had the effect he intended it to have, of putting her wonderfully at her ease, and Edith, as she placed her arm in his, felt very much as if he were a friend she had known all her life. Fortunately, at that early hour Mrs. Marmaduke Rivers, and the rest of her large noisy party, were still sound asleep, resting after the fatigues of the previous evening, and so she was safe from all unpleasant observation or interference on their part.

The last thing Miss Vivian remembered of Königswinter, was Lieschen at the head of the pier, still with tearful eyes, and with a bunch of common garden flowers, gathered in ‘hot haste’ for the lady who had been so kind to her, and which Captain Neville offered to carry with so sober a grace, that Edith little guessed the girl had been too quick for her, and told him in breathless accents the whole story of her

generosity, while he was waiting at the foot of the stairs.

Once on board the steamer, the distance between Königswinter and Bonn, which had appeared to Edith so great and formidable during the storm of last night, seemed now to disappear as if by magic. A very few minutes and she would be among her own people again. But neither did this thought give her so much consolation as it would have done twelve hours before, though she had far too much confidence in the good taste and good feeling of the Wentworth family in general, to dread for a moment that there would be any unpleasant joking on their part on the subject of her last night's adventures ; at any rate, not for months to come. It would seem like ingratitude to her companion, she thought, if, after all his kindness and consideration to her, she were to show herself so very glad to part company. As for Harry Neville himself, with the best intentions, he had never been able from the first to feel so

sorry as perhaps he ought to have done at the unfortunate *contretemps* which had made a young and charming lady for the time being dependent upon his escort and protection; and it was not in human nature to suppose that he would be in high spirits now (excepting, of course, for her sake), when the pleasant familiar intercourse it had entailed, was just on the point of coming to an end.

And so the thoughts of both were somewhat preoccupied, and they were unusually silent. There were but very few passengers on the boat at that early hour, for it was still little more than seven o'clock, and they had the deck pretty well to themselves. But this, instead of setting them at their ease, as might have been supposed, seemed to have rather the contrary effect. They only spoke occasionally, and then on the most common-place subjects. Most of the conversation was carried on *at* Prince Rupert, each reproaching him alternately with being the cause of all the mischief, while

he, poor dog, sat in front of them, looking with earnest eyes from one to the other, and wagging his tail most impenitently all the while.

Just before they reached Bonn, they walked to the stern of the boat, to catch a parting glimpse of Nonnenwerth before the bend in the river should hide it quite from view. Edith felt that now, if ever, was her time for speaking the thanks which had been trembling on her lips that whole morning. It was hard work, and her colour rose, and her breath came very quickly at the thought of what she was about to do. But she knew that she owed him at least this return, for all his courteous care and kindness to herself, and so was resolved to make the effort. There was a moment or two of perfect silence, and then Edith spoke, saying what she had to say in a hurried, nervous tone —something like the way in which a child repeats a lesson it is afraid of forgetting.

“ You must *just* let me thank you before we part for all you have done for me. You

have been so very kind; indeed, I do not know what I should have done last night if it had not been for you."

It was a dangerous speech to make, with her colour coming and going, and her heart beating so wildly as it was all the time. Perhaps she would never have made it if she had not been very near her journey's end, so near, indeed, that she fancied she could already see Mr. Wentworth standing at the extreme end of the Bonn landing-stage. She had been prepared to see the bright look of pleasure which came over her companion's face, and perhaps to have something pretty said to her in return, but she had not been quite prepared to have the hand, which she had almost instinctively extended to him as she spoke, grasped so eagerly, or held so fast as he did hold it, while he made his answer. It was but a short one.

"And before we part, you must just let *me* say so much as this. Though we should never meet again after to-day, even if I

should live to be an old man, I shall never forget the happy hours of the last few days, never ! They have been the happiest of my whole life. Nor can I regret, as I ought to do, the accident of last night, since, by your own confession, it has enabled me to be of use to you.”

He stopped suddenly, afraid of losing his self-control ; *afraid*, now that his lips were once unsealed, of saying too much to one who though he seemed to have known her half a life time, was after all but a comparative stranger.

She was looking away from him, half frightened at the excitement her few words had conjured up, and not caring to meet the glance of those honest blue eyes, which she knew were fixed upon her so earnestly. And then, considerate to the last, he released her hand, and turned away abruptly. Poor fellow ! he did not know that he had been bidding her farewell.

Presently he spoke again in a lighter tone.

“ Will you take your flowers now, or shall I carry them on shore for you ? ” he asked.

“ Thank you, I will take them myself now,” Edith answered, with a smile, glad of an excuse to change the subject.

He gave them into her hand, and the next moment one little rose-bud slipped out of the bunch and fell on to the ground.

“ Findings are keepings!” exclaimed Harry Neville, as he picked it up and deliberately put it into his own button-hole. And to this day it is my firm belief, that that rose-bud never fell out by accident. But whether it was the lady or the gentleman who was answerable for the occurrence, I am not prepared to say.

CHAPTER IV.

“I SAID you would come by this boat,” were Mr. Wentworth’s first words, as he met them on landing, and eagerly extended a hand to each. “Why Edith, my dear girl, I am right glad to have you on this side of the Rhine, safe and sound again, and so will poor mamma be. She has hardly been able to get a wink of sleep all night for thinking of you at Königswinter. What a chapter of accidents it has been!”

“It has, indeed,” said Edith, clinging to his arm; “but, Mr. Wentworth, you must help me to thank Captain Neville for all his kindness. I do not know what I should have done if he had not been there.”

“What am I to say to you, my dear fel-

low?" said Mr. Wentworth, once more warmly grasping the other's hand. "I'm sure you know, without any telling, how much obliged we all are to you for taking such good care of this naughty child. It has been the greatest possible relief to my mind that she had so good a friend to look after her interests. Come and breakfast with us an hour hence, and hear what my ladies have to say on the matter. They manage these sort of things better than I do."

Harry Neville, who was, as I said once before, as nervous as any school girl when called upon to listen to his own praises, found voice to say that he had been overmuch thanked already, and then, murmuring something about going to see about his letters, he lifted his hat to Miss Vivian, and walked quickly away towards the hotel, whilst the others sauntered on by the river side.

"Don't forget breakfast, that's a good man," Mr. Wentworth called after him; "I shall be mortal hungry in an hour's time."

“No no,” said the other, looking back, “I shan’t forget, never fear!”

For many a day afterwards Edith remembered that backward glance, and the bright laughing expression of the eyes which once again for a moment sought her own.

“Well, Miss Edith, what do you say?” asked Mr. Wentworth, “are you sleepy or not, for I suppose you were up early? Will you like to go in and rest for an hour or so, or do you think a stroll by the river will do you more good?”

“Much more,” she replied, “particularly if you are going with me. I am not the least sleepy.”

“That’s a good girl; I am glad you are not tired, for I particularly wish to have a walk with you this morning; and a talk too. I have the strangest piece of news to tell you, Edith,” he added stopping suddenly, and looking her full in the face.

“You have?” said Edith wonderingly.

“The strangest thing you ever heard in your life, and I don’t believe you would

guess what it is, if you were try for a week. Though why you should not I don't know, for it is very odd that it should never have struck any of us before."

Edith looked up for a moment in his face, and from something she read there she knew what was coming next. Her secret was beyond her keeping now. She began to tremble and shiver, as if with cold.

"Well!" she said with just one note of impatience in her tone, "you are keeping me a long time in suspense. Do tell me what it is."

"Listen, then. Your guardian's name is Neville, as you know well; what would you say, if I were to tell you that this Captain Neville, whom we have made friends with, is a near relation of his?"

Edith tried to put on a gesture of surprise, but she did not say anything, for the simple reason that she did not know exactly what to say.

"It is true, though," continued Mr. Wentworth, without noticing her silence. "Last

night, after Kate was gone up to her mother, that friend of his—Fitzgerald his name is, I think—sat talking with me for some time in the garden. Well, we got from one subject to another, and of course among other things he talked about his friend. He told me that Captain Neville was a very distinguished Indian officer; that he fought with great gallantry in the Sutlej campaign, and at the battle of Moodkee saved his, Fitzgerald's, life at the risk of his own; that the said Captain Neville is now home on furlough for two years; moreover, that he is the second son of Sir Edward Neville, Baronet, of the Manor of Haughton, in the County of Gloucestershire, and therefore second cousin to a certain Miss Vivian, of Enderleigh Priory, in the New Forest. There, Miss Edith, what will you give me for that piece of news?"

During the recital of these several details, nearly all of which, of course, Miss Vivian knew by heart before, that young lady had had time, in some measure, to regain her

self-command. And now, thus appealed to, knowing all concealment to be utterly vain, and driven, as it were, from every refuge and resource, like the “imperial race” Macaulay tells us of at the siege of Londonderry, she ‘turned desperately to bay.’

She looked up in Mr. Wentworth’s face with as saucy a smile as she could summon at such short notice.

“And what would you say, Sir,” she asked, “if I answer that it is no news to me at all? How, if I were to tell you that I knew all this before?”

“Say! why, that you are a naughty girl, to have cheated me out of giving you a surprise. But there, it is not to be wondered at, as I said just now; the only wonder is, that we did not find it out sooner. You discovered your relationship while you were talking over the affairs of the nation at supper-time, I conclude, and then spent the evening together pleasantly enough. By the bye, I suppose you *did* have supper, eh, Edith?” he added with a mischievous smile.

But Edith did not answer his last question. Not even to save herself from the richly-deserved scolding which she knew would fall upon her devoted head, if he should learn the whole truth, could she suffer Mr. Wentworth to remain under a false impression.

“I knew it before then,” she said quietly.

“You did, Miss Slyboots, and never told me? Well, I suppose you had some good reason for keeping the secret to your worthy selves. I know you cannot have met at Haughton; which found the other out first, pray?”

“I did,” said Edith, trembling again, and feeling very much as if she were in a witness-box under strict cross-examination.

“Upon my word, the plot begins to thicken; quite a pretty romance. And when did you find him out, if I may ask?”

“The very first day we saw him—the day he sat next to me at dinner.”

“Sat next you at dinner?” he said in an inquiring tone; for it so happened that Mr.

Wentworth, who, as I said before, was very apt to be blind to things that went on under his very nose, had never seen him on that occasion. “What day was that?” he asked the minute after, rather ashamed of having betrayed his ignorance, and making believe that he had forgotten.

“ Friday, the day before he lent you the newspaper,” she answered, not in the least deceived by his little ruse; and then she tried to direct his attention to something on the opposite bank, in the hope of diverting his thoughts from the subject they were discussing, and so evading his next question. But she was not suffered thus to escape.

“ Well, but you have not told me half yet, and I am quite curious. How soon did *le cousin* know? did he find it out for himself, or did you have to tell him?”

“ No,” said Edith, rather abruptly.

“ What does that ‘no’ mean, Miss Vivian of Enderleigh?”

“ He did not find it out.”

“ And so you had to tell him; what a

joke ; how and when did you do it ? I am longing to know all about it.”

No answer. Edith, with her cheeks on fire and her eyes full of tears, walked on silently beside him, feeling more heartily ashamed of herself than she had ever done in her life before.

“ Come, Edith, when did you tell him ? I want to hear.”

There was no evading this straightforward question. “ He does not know,” she stammered out at last.

“ What did you say, my dear ? Did I hear you right ; he does not know ?”

And Mr. Wentworth, as he said this, stopped suddenly in his walk, and took his companion’s hand to stop her also.

It was worth something to see how his face had altered in that one instant, and how the tone of his voice had changed from gay to grave. He waited for her answer, but none came.

“ What is all this mystery about, Edith ?” he asked a little sternly, and looking her

full in the face. “ You say you have known this young man to be your cousin for full four days past, and that he does not know it; and that you have been in his company hour after hour, and have not told him. I don’t quite understand what it all means, my dear.”

Mr. Wentworth, you see, was a simple-minded man; simple, not in the sense of ignorance, but in the real old meaning of the word *sans pli*, without a fold,—and so he found it hard to believe or understand that any one else, one especially whom he loved and trusted, should be guilty of such an act of duplicity, ‘ two-foldedness,’ if we may call it so.

Still no answer came, only Edith trembled more and more.

“ Edith, my dear child, this is not right; you and I must understand each other better, though perhaps you will say I have no right to press you on the subject.” And Mr. Wentworth’s tone now was still kind, though very serious. “ I ask you again, is

it possible that you have known Captain Neville to be your guardian's son for four whole days, and you have gone on associating with him, and have all the time allowed him to think you a perfect stranger, without ever telling him the truth? Is this the case, my dear? I must have an answer."

"He does not know, and I have not told him," Edith said at last petulantly, as if the words almost choked her.

"Then, Edith, I must say I am astonished at you. As the little boy says in 'Tom Brown's School-days,' 'you are the honestest girl I know,' and this is *not* honest. Why, it is as bad as telling a downright falsehood."

This was more than poor Edith could bear; she burst into a fit of angry tears.

"It's *not*," she exclaimed indignantly; "I never told you a falsehood in my whole life. How dare you say such things to me, Mr. Wentworth?" And she tried hard, as she spoke, to drag away her

hand from his grasp, and to walk on alone.

The old temper was in her still, you see, which had flashed out so fiercely that night twelve years before, when Harry Neville had surprised her in the shrubbery at Enderleigh, and had taken the thorn out of her finger almost against her will. But for the grace of God, Edith Vivian would have been a passionate woman still. Her temper, however, very seldom got the better of her now. Mr. Wentworth had never seen her like this before, and he was both grieved and shocked; but he knew from instinct, that in such a noble nature as hers, the outburst could not be of long duration, and that it was certain to be soon followed by agonies of self-reproach. His next words helped to bring about the reaction.

“I *dare* to say such things to you for two reasons, Edith,” he said quietly; “first, because in this matter you seem to me to have been guilty of an acted falsehood, if not of a spoken untruth; and next because,

as an old man and a clergyman, it is my duty to warn you when I see you doing what is wrong. There, there, my dear, don't cry so bitterly;" for the repentance had come, as he had expected, and Edith, impetuous as ever, had fast hold of his hand again now, and was covering it with kisses and penitential tears. "You are sorry for what you said I know, and so am I, but let it pass; we are too good friends to quarrel about such a trifle, are we not?"

"Oh, Mr. Wentworth, I don't deserve that you should forgive me," sobbed poor Edith; "and yet I always do say that you and Aunt Fanny are the best friends I have in the world, for you are the only ones who ever tell me of my faults."

"My dear child," said Mr. Wentworth, almost overcome in his turn by her humility, "there are not so many of them, after all;" and then, by way of sealing his forgiveness, he took her in his arms and gave her just such a fatherly kiss as he would have given his daughter Kate.

“And now, Edith,” he went on, “let you and me have a little quiet talk about this unlucky business and settle what had best be done about it. I cannot conceive why you should have made any mystery about the matter for a moment.”

But the answer to that question was Edith’s own secret, and once more she kept silence.

“I suppose it is to be traced to the old root of bitterness,” continued her companion, shaking his head at her reprovingly; “your own self-conscious suspicious nature. I thought, my dear, you were growing wiser during these last few years. But, at any rate, the mystery must come to an end now. You or I must tell Captain Neville the truth before he is an hour older.”

“And he hates the very sound of my name,” said Edith, looking up at him and smiling through her tears.

“Does he? poor child! but we can’t help that, though I think I may prophesy that he won’t hate it after to-day. Our duty is

clear enough, though I must say the fact of your having concealed your relationship for the last few days makes it all the more difficult to acknowledge it now. The only question is, had you better tell him, or shall I?"

"Oh, Mr. Wentworth, if *you* only would," exclaimed Edith, seizing on the least chance of a reprieve. "Do you know that the first thing I thought of doing after I landed this morning was to ask you to tell him. It was, indeed; and then you took me so by surprise, and I got angry and lost my temper, and so forgot all about it. If you would do this for me, I should be so thankful! There are circumstances—he has said things—which would make it so very awkward for me to tell him myself;" and here poor Edith came to a full stop, blushing painfully.

"There are circumstances—he has said things! Edith, my dear, what am I to understand by all this?" asked Mr. Wentworth, looking at her very mischievously. "You are under my protection, young lady,

at present, you must remember; and if you don't behave yourself properly, I shall have to report you to your rightful guardian, who is Captain Neville's papa, you know."

"Oh I don't mean anything of that kind," was Edith's answer, not a very lucid one, it must be confessed. "But I don't know what he will say or think when he finds I am the Miss Vivian he has heard so much about. He hates my very name," she repeated, sighing.

"Yes, my dear, I think you said that before," said Mr. Wentworth, trying to look grave; "and I think I observed, in answer, that he would not be likely to hate it much longer. We shall see."

"But perhaps," exclaimed Edith, as a sudden hope dawned upon her, "perhaps his friend will have told him already."

"Not he," was the answer; "I never let Master Fitzgerald into the secret. You see I calculated upon having a grand sensation scene this morning—quite a *dénouement* in fact, and now you have gone and spoilt all

my pretty little plans by telling me you were in the plot all the time."

"The others do not know either, then?"

"Not yet. You don't think I would trust that giddy little Kate. No, my dear. You and I are the only ones behind the scenes at present. And now, Edith, we must go in, for it is quite late. I shall let you have your breakfast in peace, and after that you must prepare yourself as best you can to receive the stormy reproaches of your kinsman, who, you say, hates your very name."

"*L'homme propose, mais Dieu dispose.*"

So says the French proverb. Half-way down the garden they were met by Kate, who looked very flushed and excited and half inclined to cry.

"Oh, Edith! Papa! where have you been?" she exclaimed, almost petulantly. "Here's poor Captain Neville and his friend gone away quite distressed, because they could not find you to say good-bye."

“Gone away?” exclaimed both her hearers, looking perfectly aghast. “Where to?”

“Back to England, as fast as trains and boats can carry them. There was a telegram waiting for Captain Neville, which must have arrived last night, to tell him that his father is dangerously ill and that he is wanted home immediately. And he found that there was a train which started within half an hour for Belgium, and ten minutes afterwards the omnibus was at the door and they were quite ready to go; and I ran into the garden and looked everywhere for you, and tried so hard to make you hear, and it was all of no use; and Captain ~~Neville~~ shook hands with me three times over, and seemed quite miserable not to be able to say goodbye to you; and I was so very very sorry for him, for he seemed so nervous and unhappy about his father.”

And poor Kate’s voice grew quite tremulous before she came to the end of her almost breathless recital.

“And I am very sorry too, for more rea-

sons than one," said Mr. Wentworth, gravely; but Edith said never a word.

"*Il y a des femmes et des femmes.*"

She went through the ceremony of breakfast with perfect self-possession, and talked very cheerfully to Mr. Wentworth and to Kate, who still seemed quite upset after the morning's parting.

But an hour afterwards, when Kate had almost forgotten the existence of their late companion, Edith was sitting by the window of her own room, the doors fast closed and locked, with her white face resting on her hands, and her tearless eyes fixed upon the restless river and the Drachenfels beyond; her dog was with her, and at last he came near and nestled into her arms.

"Ah, Rupert," she said in a low voice, as she laid her throbbing head against his shaggy forehead. "He has gone away, and perhaps we shall never see him again; and we should have liked to have said good-bye to him, you and I. He was very good to you, Doggie, and to me too; he saved your

life once, and we will never forget him, will we, Rupert, dear old dog?"

And the dog looked up at her out of his great honest eyes, and made answer as plainly as any dog could, "No, mistress! we never *will* forget him. Never!"

CHAPTER 'V.

A WEEK afterwards, on the eve of St. Partridge, as Mr. Albany Fonblanque humorously calls the 31st of August, Miss Vivian and her friends arrived at Baden Baden.

Edith had received a letter from her aunt, Miss Fanny Neville, the day before she left Bonn, telling her of her guardian's illness, but giving by no means so alarming a report as seemed to have reached Captain Neville. As she made no suggestion of returning home, Edith and Mr. Wentworth gave up all idea of doing so, and adhered to their original intention of proceeding to Heidelberg and Baden. They had travelled leisurely, as was their wont, stopping at every place on their road which promised a

fine view or seemed in any way worthy of a visit. With the Lurlei St. Goar, and all the romantic scenery of the grand old Rhine which lies between Coblenz and Bingen, they were especially delighted; Kate pronouncing this part to be “the finest thing she had seen yet,” but Edith was of a different opinion. She maintained then and ever after that, to her taste, the gorge by Königswinter and the Seven Mountains was the loveliest spot on the whole river. Some persons do, I know, think so; but I believe that in Miss Vivian’s case the impression was in a great measure owing to association.

The sun was just setting as they drove into Baden. The day had been dull and gloomy, but the sky had cleared towards evening and the sunset was glorious. Far away in the west, in the direction of the Rhine, the horizon was bright with all the colours of the rainbow, and one dark mass of cloud which still lingered in the sun’s wake, had caught its reflected rays, and, to use

Tennyson's superb imagery, looked like

"A looming bastion fringed with fire."

Mr. Wentworth selected the Badischer Hof to be their temporary residence. This hotel is situated almost in the outskirts of the beautiful little town of Baden, yet quite close to the shady gardens, half open, half enclosed, which lead from thence to the Kur-saal.

An hour or two after their arrival, Mr. Wentworth and Edith were seen strolling through these gardens, or rather along the path which skirts them. Mrs. Wentworth was not feeling well, and Kate would not leave her mother, so these two started alone for their evening walk. Their way lay by the bank of the little river Oes, a beautiful winding trout stream, which runs through the very midst of the valley in which Baden Baden is situated.

Very shallow, but clear as crystal, the little river danced and sparkled in the moonlight like liquid silver; here and there its course

was broken and turned by the projecting trunk of a tree or loose fragments of rock, and then the water dashing and foaming over these obstacles, looked like a stream of glittering diamonds. Edith stopped more than once, almost spell-bound by the lovely scene before her. She was constrained to own now, that not even in her dreams had she ever seen anything to equal it. Even Heidelberg, in all its stately magnificence, she thought, was not so beautiful as this. As the guide-book says, "There can be but one opinion as to the beauty of the situation of the town of Baden."

Tall and grand the hills rise around it on all sides, spurs of the great Black Forest range which lies a few miles further on. These are clothed with the dark pine woods from which the Black Forest takes its name, interspersed here and there with the paler green of the beech tree, which gives an agreeable variety to the colouring. Nearer, apparently loftier than all others, the hills

of the Alte Schloss, the Yberg, and the Mercurberg, stand like giant sentinels of the valley which lies smiling at their feet. The town, built on the slope of one of the hills, and half hidden amongst the trees; the clear sparkling river, rushing and leaping on in its rapid course towards the Rhine, and falling here and there over the loose stones in miniature cataracts; the more cheerful foliage of the valley contrasting so well with the dark frowning woods above; all these things combine to form as beautiful a scene as the eye can well wish to look upon. Lacking something of the sublimity of Switzerland, the valley of Baden Baden approaches perhaps as nearly to the grandeur of Swiss scenery as anything to be seen on this side of the Alps.

But what need to say more? Those who have seen Baden, know well how lovely it is, and to those who have not seen it, my poor words of description will convey but a very faint idea of its beauty.

Nature has done much for the little capi-

tal of the Duke of Baden's dominions, but art has done something too. Witness the shady walks and avenues on the left bank of the Oes, opposite to the town, which have been enclosed and cultivated to form part of the gardens of the Kur-haus, or Kur-saal, as it is now commonly called. The building itself, within and without, is decorated with all the taste and elegance of which the nineteenth century is capable. Enter the spacious hall, walk through the gorgeous rooms, you are almost dazzled by the blaze of light reflected and repeated in countless mirrors. No expense has been spared; the hangings and the furniture are the handsomest that wealth can purchase or art devise. The whole scene is like some vision of fairyland conjured up by the touch of Aladdin's lamp; luxury greater than that of a palace surrounds the visitor on every side. And yet how few feel any sense of honest pleasure whilst wandering through these brilliant saloons. There is a taint in the very atmosphere, a subtle poison lurk-

ing everywhere, for it is horribly true that all this magnificence is paid for and maintained by the iniquitous earnings of the gambling tables.

Free as the air to all comers, the establishment is *self-supporting*. There, in the two smaller rooms opening out from the great saloon, are the ‘infernal wheels’ which keep the great machine at work. Simple looking tables enough they are, covered with dark green cloth. Roulette is played at one, at the other rouge-et-noir; and few who have once stood, if only for a few moments, near either of those green tables, and watched the faces of the professed gamblers who sit there hour after hour, will ever look again with unmixed pleasure upon the splendour that reigns around, for they will feel, and feel with justice, that it is bought with the price of blood.

Ay, of blood! for many a poor craven wretch has left those brilliant rooms ruined alike in body and soul, cursing the miserable infatuation which has robbed him of

his last penny, and within a few hours, or even minutes, has ended the life which has become unbearable, by his own wicked hand. Not that these little 'accidents' are often spoken of at Baden Baden, the scandal would be too great. Here they are hushed up, denied if possible "*pour encourager les autres*," but in the columns of a free English newspaper, or in the pages of a private letter, such things are sometimes to be read of, and, what is more, are known to be true.

What wonder then that with some such tale of horror fresh in the memory, the honest hearts of those in whom familiarity has not yet bred contempt, should recoil and sicken at the very sight of the luxury which is paid for at such an awful price?

Some such thoughts as these were in Mr. Wentworth's and Miss Vivian's minds as they strolled leisurely through the rooms on the evening of which I speak. They had lingered for some time on the outer terrace, drinking coffee and listening to the fine Prussian band which was playing in the

garden. This was pleasant enough, but when they entered the building it was, to use Edith's own words, "like going from Paradise into Pandemonium." The change from the moonlight and the cool evening air without, to the blaze of gas and the stifling atmosphere within, was painful enough at first to an uninitiated person. Edith seemed resolved not to be pleased with anything she saw. She was good-humouredly captious with Mr. Wentworth, and refused to admire all the things he tried to interest her in; many of which were really worthy of admiration as specimens of art.

Once she caught sight of her own face in a looking-glass as she passed, and quite laughed to see how cross she looked. Mr. Wentworth, however, was determined to show her over the whole establishment, and resisted her playful entreaties to be allowed to go out into the garden again. He did not mean to show himself there often, he said, and so she had better look at everything there was to see while she had the chance.

“ Les hommes agissent, mais Dieu les mène,” said Bossuet.

They strolled quietly through the crowded halls, Edith teasing and contradicting her companion at every step, as was her wont when she was in one of her provoking moods, and he answering her in the same bantering tone. Presently they entered one of the side rooms, which was devoted to the mysteries of *trente et quarante*, better known to most persons perhaps by the name of “rouge et noir.” Then all Edith’s gaiety vanished at once, and she and her companion both became silent and subdued. Months afterwards she said that she saw in her dreams, the faces of the men and women who were seated round that gaming-table. Such a strange mixed company as it was ; old and young, rich and poor, the prince and the peasant, the man in the full vigour of his life, and the girl who would be dead of consumption before many weeks had passed, sat side by side, some winning, some losing, but all with the same hungry look (I can

find no better word) in their restless eyes. Some had flushed faces (mostly women these), but nearly all were deadly pale ; their cheeks were of that grey ashy colour which one sees in men who have the ague. A few tried to conceal their anxiety under a mask of studied indifference, and they did it well, too, throwing their gold pieces on the table as if it were a matter of little moment to them whether they won or lost. There would be a smile on their faces, perhaps a light jest for some friend standing near ; but after all they were only acting a part, and even with these, there was a time, every now and then, during those few moments which followed the words spoken as by the voice of an automaton, “ *Le jeu est fait*,” when a close watcher might see that the lips, fast set though they were, would quiver ever so little, and the hands, toying probably with the money laid in heaps on the table before them, would never be for a single instant quite still. Slight signs these, but very expressive ones of the fiery excitement which

was at work within. Occasionally an angry word might be heard, or a muttered curse, but not often ; on the whole outward decorum was tolerably well preserved. There was but little of elation to be seen when the *rouleau* of fifty gold pieces became an hundred, and not much sign of despair when the last double florin had been staked and lost. Such exhibitions of excitement would not be considered in good taste at Baden Baden.

Opposite to where Edith was standing sat an old white-headed English nobleman, noble by birth rather than by nature. Men *said* (and men say much about each other at these German spas, there is hardly a man, woman, or child whose face is known at Baden or Homburg of whom the *habitués* have not some tale to tell) that he had tried the world's pleasures from his youth up, and had tired of each and all in succession, except this. As a young man he had been the companion of royalty, the pride of clubs, the petted darling of women. *Alas !*

many a woman had lived to curse his very name. Now, in extreme old age, bereft of home and friends, half ruined in fortune, and wholly ruined in character, the excitement of the gambling-table had become the necessity of his life.

Season after season at Ems, first at Wiesbaden, and later at Homburg and Baden, he was as well known as the waiters and the croupiers. Associates he had but few, intimate friends none, only hirelings were about him now. His mornings were spent in listlessness, often in physical pain; his days seemed to begin only when, after dining sumptuously in solitude at some *restaurant*, he was supported by his servant into the rooms to take his place at the *roulette* or *rouge et noir* table. There he would sometimes sit during a whole evening, playing with varying success. He was a handsome man still, though the excesses of earlier years, and the weariness of a wasted life, had left their traces on his countenance. It was a sad sight to see this old nobleman,

tottering now on the very verge of the grave, still clinging so desperately to the last pleasure this earth could give him ; to see him, a rich man still, though he had run through the larger half of a princely fortune, watching with glittering eyes the chances of the game, eager as any child to win. Not much less sad was it to watch the young Frenchwoman sitting at his right hand side. She was pretty, brilliant, and sparkling as French women often are, but her eyes spoiled her ; they were bold, *bad* eyes, from which women instinctively recoiled. She was dressed becomingly, in the extreme of the fashion, her hands glittering with many showy rings, to conceal perhaps the want of the one plain gold one, which *might* not have been there. She played moderately, staking her money with some amount of care and calculation, but invariably with ill-success. At intervals she turned round and spoke in a light imperious tone to a bearded foreigner who was leaning over her chair. “ *Tiens, Alphonse, il me faut*

encore d'argent ;" and forthwith, from the recesses of Alphonse's waistcoat-pocket fresh supplies of money, not very large in amount, were doled out to her.

Next in order to her sat a Heidelberg student, the son of some German Prince, playing high and recklessly, and looking as if quite ready to fight the first person, who disputed his right to ruin himself body and soul. Leaning over his chair, and watching the game with intense excitement, was a poor Strasburg mechanic. Now and then, with trembling hands and throbbing heart, he ventured to lay upon the table a double florin piece, and one after another these—the hard-earned fruits of many days' honest labour—were swept away by the merciless clutch of the croupier's rake. Was there no one at hand to speak a word of warning to these unhappy lads, rich and poor alike, to tell them of the misery they were preparing for themselves in the future, and to hinder them while there was yet time from forging those torturing fetters of habit from

which in after years they would find no power or hope to escape?

Ah, me! when those packs of painted cardboard, “Devil’s picture-books,” as they have been called by Puritan preachers, were first invented to amuse the poor old mad king of France, I wonder if those who made them, ever dreamt of one thousandth part of the misery which their ingenuity would entail upon future generations.

A little more to the right, on the same side of the table, sat an English officer; at least, there was that undefinable something about him which seemed to indicate that he was, or had been, in the army. He was a fine looking man, somewhat over forty years of age, one who looked as if he could do brave and noble deeds when the occasion offered; one who might have made his way side by side with Lacy, yea, up that steep bank in front of the Great Redoubt, or ridden with the six hundred straight up to the Russian guns, or carried a wounded comrade from under the sweeping fire of the Redan. He

looked as though he had been made for better things than to sit night after night at that treacherous gaming-table, as he had done now for more than a month past, fast gaining the appearance and the reputation of a professed gambler. He sat with his head leaning on his hand, his brow furrowed with lines of anxious thought, and played evidently with some care and 'system,' dotting or pricking down from time to time the result of his calculations upon the red and black lined card which lay before him. He was very silent and quiet, trying hard to conceal the excitement he would fain have subdued; but the veins on his forehead stood out like blue knotted cords, and even the heavy cavalry moustache could not hide the quivering of the white lips beneath. A lady, no longer very young, but still beautiful, graceful, refined looking, though with a careworn expression on her face, stood not very far off, watching him intently and sorrowfully. At last she ventured near, and laid her hand upon her husband's arm.

• “Harry dear,” she said (Edith heard the words, and the name thrilled strangely on her ear), haven’t you played long enough? it is quite time to go home.”

He shook her hand off roughly, turning upon her with a look she had never seen in his eyes before, and said something which sounded almost like a muttered curse. Edith could not hear the words, but she saw the poor lady shrink away, her eyes swimming with tears. Presently she returned to her old place, and under pretence of reading a newspaper, resumed her sad watch. She looked so fragile, so high bred, so utterly unfit to be alone in such a place, that Edith, in her loving, unworldly nature, longed to go up to the poor crushed wife, to link her arm in hers, and ask her to go home with them. She was a stranger in Baden, you see, and did not know that it is peopled, more or less, with sad faces and aching hearts. Perhaps if she had been there for a week, she would have taken it as a matter of course that that pale wife should sit there,

keeping her weary watch over the spendthrift husband, whom she had held in such high honour till within the past few weeks.

But there were some few bright faces to be seen in the room that evening; new married couples spending their honeymoon abroad, the brides leaning proudly on their new lords' arms, whilst the latter explained to them the intricacies of the game (very likely all wrong) or threw down a florin or two to show how easily they could be lost. But they seldom lingered long; the outer air, the music, the moonlit walks, had greater charms for such as these. Here and there a merry group of English girls, crowding round their Paterfamilias, would stand for a few minutes to watch the game, and laugh at the stolid faces of the fat croupiers, sitting in their funny high chairs. Stolid, indeed, they were. Perhaps the most striking contrast in the whole scene was the contrast between the eager agitated countenances of the players, and the calm, impassible expression on the faces of those employés, to

whom it mattered not one iota whether the bank broke the next minute, or everybody in the room was reduced to beggary. I cannot imagine a much more dreary, miserable existence than these men lead, sitting there day after day, like mere machines, wearing their lives out in the same unceasing routine of wicked work, seeing the same faces round that table month after month, and year after year. To them is forbidden the luxury, of feeling their pulses quickened with even a momentary feeling of painful or pleasurable excitement, or of letting their hearts beat with one generous throb of pity, for the unhappy victims whom it is their business, if possible, to ruin. One can hardly conceive that any man, with a man's true nature and instincts, should, of his own free will, submit to be chained to such a life of drudgery as this. But men are not all alike, and the croupiers are paid well, to 'keep them honest.'

Edith and Mr. Wentworth had stood for some little time watching the strange and

to them most painful scene. There was a peculiar fascination which seemed to rivet their eyes upon the weird, anxious faces of the men and women seated round that gaming-table, and they lingered longer than their sober judgment would at any other time, perhaps, have approved. They were turning to walk away, however, when the attitudes and hasty movements of the persons standing immediately around them attracted their attention. Evidently there was something going on at the table which had aroused the general interest, and almost involuntarily a degree of the excitement which seemed to have taken possession of all the spectators communicated itself to Mr. Wentworth and his companion. Presently the former inquired what it all meant. A voluble young Frenchman to whom he had spoken gave him a detailed reply. "An Englishman was playing high," he said; "that man with the dark hair, sitting to the right, with his back towards them. He had nearly broken the bank a

few evenings before, but since then he had had a run of ill luck. To-night he had begun by making a few fortunate ‘coups,’ but now he was losing heavily, and seemed resolved to tempt his ill fortune to the utmost. Some persons thought he was not English, he looked more like an Italian or a Spaniard: he spoke German fluently; no one knew exactly who he was, or where he came from.”

Such was the young Frenchman’s tale—a tale to which Edith listened with an interest she found it hard to account for. Now, if Mr. Wentworth had done his strict duty as a clergyman of the Church of England, he would have drawn his companion’s arm within his own, and led her immediately into another part of the building, far away from the scene where the infatuated young Englishman seemed so desperately bent upon consummating his own ruin. But he, too, seemed possessed at that moment with a strange wish to watch for the last act of the drama which they had already

seen in part played out. After all, we are but human, and the best of us are weak at times.

Meanwhile, the young gambler played on recklessly, apparently unconscious, or, if conscious, utterly indifferent to the excitement his play was causing in all around him.

Was he English or not? It was difficult to say. His back was turned towards Edith, so she could not see his features; but the black hair cut closely at the back of the head, and the rich dark complexion, might have betokened a southern origin. His dress was foreign in its style, and whether he spoke (as he did more than once) in French or German, his accent seemed equally good. But there was one proof which was not likely to deceive. His hand was the hand of an Englishman. Not small, but well formed, and the long, shapely fingers were unadorned by any rings save one. On the last finger of his left hand, which he kept passing restlessly

over his brow and head, as though to still the hot blood which was coursing and throbbing so madly through his veins, was a plain bloodstone signet ring. The ring was plain, but the gold setting was of a quaint and curious device, and instantly attracted Edith Vivian's attention. Curious as it was, it yet seemed to her strangely familiar. She watched those quick impulsive movements of his hand very keenly.

As the play continued the excitement of the spectators increased more and more. The pressure of those behind, who were anxious to see what was going forward, became greater every moment. Mr. Wentworth and Edith found themselves pushed forward much closer to the gambling-table, and could not easily have made their retreat now, if they had wished to do so. The crisis came at last. The heaps of gold which at first had lain in front of the player, had melted rapidly away, and he had come to his last stake—a large one, larger than any he had played as yet; but he was prepared

to win or lose it all at once. The words of the croupier rang out in a loud and sonorous voice, "*Faites vos jeux, Messieurs!*" The rouleaux of golden pieces were in the Englishman's hand, and he was about to stake them on the red, when he hesitated, gave a quick glance at his card, and placed them instead upon the black. After that again, as if with some sudden impulse, he seemed disposed to transfer them back to the red. The rake was in his hand, but it was too late. Once more the croupier's voice was heard — "*Le jeu est fait, rien ne va plus!*" A few moments of intense excitement followed; even the other players at the table seemed to have forgotten all about their own stakes for the time, and were watching eagerly the result of the Englishman's last throw. Then the cards were dealt out, and the fiat was given forth, "*Rouge gagne et couleur!*" Red had won again. It was all over, and he had lost. A low murmur arose from those around, but not a syllable escaped his own lips. It was utter ruin to him, but

he made no complaint. Throwing down his rake with a slight gesture of impatience, he rose hastily from his chair, and made his way through the excited crowd out into the cooler, purer atmosphere beyond. As he passed Edith Vivian her eyes fell full upon his bloodless face, white and rigid as the face of the dead.

A few moments afterwards Mr. Wentworth felt her leaning heavily on his arm. He looked down upon her, and saw to his surprise and alarm that her face was scarcely less colourless than that of the man who had just passed out. He thought she was going to faint.

“Mr. Wentworth, please take me home,” she said, almost in a whisper.

“My dear Edith, what is the matter?” he asked most kindly. “This room is too warm for you; I ought not to have kept you here so long. Come away, my poor child, come.”

He put his arm round her waist, and very soon had led her into the larger room.

“Now, my dear, will you sit here a moment, and let me fetch you something—a glass of water, or some wine.”

But still she clung to him. “Oh, nothing, thank you; only take me home; please take me home!” she repeated in a tone which made his very heart ache.

He was frightened at her manner and appearance, but thought it best to let her have her own way.

“Can you walk?” he asked.

“Oh yes, quite well.”

She walked on almost faster than he could follow her. He thought the cool night air would revive her, if it was reviving she needed, for she did not seem faint, as he had thought at first; but as the full flood of moonlight streamed down upon her face, he saw that she was still as pale as death, and that her lips were set fast, as if in pain.

How different the walk was now, to what it had been an hour before! There was no lingering this time to look at the rare beauty of the fir-clad hills, or to watch the spark-

ling Oes leaping over the sunken stones. If Edith and her companion had been summoned to the death-bed of some dearly-loved friend, they could not have gone on their way more rapidly, more steadily, than they did, turning their eyes neither to the right hand nor to the left. He spoke to her once or twice, but she scarcely answered him, and only seemed anxious to press onwards as fast as possible. He was fairly puzzled. Evidently she had had some severe shock, but he could not guess what it was, and he spared her further questioning. They reached the Badischer Hof at last, and then Edith pressed Mr. Wentworth's hand in silence, and hurried away in the direction of her own room.

Kate found her there a few minutes afterwards, lying all dressed as she was on her bed, her head buried in the pillows, her hands nervously clasping and unclasping each other, her breath coming in gasping tearless sobs.

“Edith, my own dear darling Edith, tell me what it is!” And, trembling in every

limb, she laid her flushed cheek against Edith's, and whispered sweet words of sympathy into her ear. Very soon the poor bowed head was resting on Kate's shoulder. Her father had told her something of what had happened—all he knew; but this was not much. And now Edith told her all; told her in a few broken words of the Englishman who had played so recklessly, and lost his last stake; and how he had brushed past her so closely that he had almost touched her with his clothes. "I saw his face quite plainly," said Edith. Then she drew Kate's head down closer to her own, holding her hand in such a vice, that the poor girl could hardly bear the pain, and the last words came in a frightened sob, "I knew him in an instant. 'Oh, Kate, Kate, it was my brother Ernest!'"

CHAPTER VI.

“Not to have seen him for all these years, and then to meet him thus.” This was the burden of her sorrow. Kate soothed and comforted her as best she could; her own tears, which were falling fast the while, being the truest solace she could offer. The two girls stayed talking together till long past midnight, but strange to say, after Kate left her, Edith slept for a few hours quite soundly. She woke not very long after daybreak rested and refreshed, feeling thoroughly self-possessed again, and quite equal to the somewhat painful task which lay before her. She and Kate had come to a decision during their midnight conference, as to what would be the best course for her

to adopt, with regard to her prodigal brother, and looking at that decision in the sober light of day, Edith felt only the more resolved to carry it out. She would take Mr. Wentworth partly into her confidence. She could not well help herself, indeed. He would naturally expect to be told something, in explanation of the change which had come over her on the previous evening. But she would not tell him all, as from no one could she expect such perfect sympathy as her dear little Kate had given her. So when Mr. Wentworth met her in the morning, and congratulated her upon looking quite her old self again, almost before he could speak another word, she interrupted him by saying—

“I am quite well this morning, thank you, dear Mr. Wentworth, and I must ask you to forgive me for frightening you last night ; but I am sure you will when I tell you that I was nearly as frightened myself, I had such a startling surprise. Whom do you think I caught sight of in the little

room where they were playing *rouge et noir*? My brother Ernest Vivian, whom I have not seen for years and years. I knew him in an instant, and am quite sure it was no mistake, but almost before I saw him he was gone. You may fancy how astonished and startled I was."

She spoke as lightly as she could, and Mr. Wentworth answered her much in the same tone, expressing his own surprise at the news. But he asked no more questions. He did not even ask her why she had not told him this last night, to set his mind at rest regarding herself. I think he had a shrewd suspicion of the truth, and perhaps honoured her in his heart for thus generously endeavouring to screen her half-brother's faults; but at least he was too much of a gentleman to force himself into her confidence, although he looked upon her almost in the light of his own child.

"I have not been idle this morning, you may be sure," Edith added presently. "I have had all the papers, or *vade mecum*,

or whatever they may call such things here, and looked over them, and I find a Mr. Vivian's name down in this one as staying at the Hôtel de l'Europe. It must be Ernest. And now, dear Mr. Wentworth, you must be good and kind, and do what I ask, for I want to send you, after breakfast, to find him out for me, as I shall have no pleasure in anything, till I have seen him again. I don't suppose he would remember *me*, for the last time he saw me I was quite a little girl."

If Mr. Wentworth, when, an hour after, he was ushered into one of the most luxurious saloons of the Hôtel de l'Europe, recognized the handsome, but languid looking Englishman who rose from a lounging chair to receive him, as the ruined gambler of the night before, at least he kept his own counsel on the subject, and Edith Vivian never knew to her dying day that he had guessed the secret which bowed her proud spirit to the very dust with shame and sorrow.

The brother and sister met, not at the hotel, but in a quiet spot amidst the shady

avenues of the Kursaal Gardens; for, after all those long years of absence and estrangement, Edith could not endure that the eyes of even her dearest friends should witness their first meeting.

She had guessed rightly that her brother Ernest would not have known her if he had met her accidentally. Left to himself he would no more have recognized her than Harry Neville had done. And even as it was, when they stood side by side, she holding his hand fast locked in both her own, he could hardly bring himself to believe that the tall beautiful woman he saw before him, could be the very same sister whom he remembered as a little frowning black-eyed child at Enderleigh.

But he did not seem to her much changed, though the old frank boyish expression was gone and his face looked pale and careworn. Her eyes were full of tears, as she gazed up at the dear familiar features she had always loved so well. He looked down upon her flushed face for a minute or two in silence, then raised it nearer to his own and kissed

her lips once or twice very tenderly, and then Edith knew by instinct that she had one hold upon him left, for she felt that he loved her still.

The minutes glided into hours as the brother and sister paced slowly up and down that shady avenue. It was still early in the day, and the gay world of Baden was not yet astir, so they had the green walk nearly to themselves, and were quite undisturbed, except by the blithe carolling of the birds in the chestnut trees above.

At first Edith felt a little shy of the tall stylish looking man on whose arm she was leaning. But that feeling soon wore away. In spite of years of absence, in which she had been so sorely tempted to think of him as dead—in spite of his coldness and neglect to her dead mother and herself—in spite even of last night, he was her brother still, and very soon her other hand was clasped upon his arm, and she was looking up in his face in her old loving way and talking to him as familiarly as though they had only parted a week ago.

She won him by degrees to tell her something of his life during the years which had slipped away so fast since their last meeting. Something he told her, but not all. There was more than one dark page in that life's story, quite unfit for her pure eyes to look upon. Yet, softened as the tale was to meet her ear, there was enough in it of sin and sorrow to make poor Edith's heart ache as she listened. It told so much of blighted hopes and of a ruined life, of lost youth and premature experience, of indolence and reckless indifference. It showed so plainly the want of a life purpose or a leading principle; and, worst of all, such an utter dearth of Christian faith and hope. And all the while there was not one word spoken which could be called actually profane or irreverent, or to which the strictest of worldly moralists could object. But there is no need to speak upon distinctly sacred subjects to find out whether a man despises the religion of the gospel or not, and the taint of selfishness and sensuality will betray

itself all too plainly in the worldling's conversation, though his lips may never once perhaps transgress the bounds of moral decency.

Edith felt this intuitively, as she listened to Ernest Vivian's broken history of his past life, and she sorrowed over it in her heart of hearts. But none the less was she true to the generous purpose with which she had come forth armed to that morning's meeting. Come what would—come difficulty, or doubt, or disgrace—against the whole world's opinion—against his own will even, she would save him if she could. Even if he had been all evil, that purpose would have held good; but he *could* not be so very wicked, she thought. Weak and erring, as he must have been, he was still to her the brother Ernest who had loved her so dearly as a child—her kind patient playfellow of the old days at Enderleigh.

Perhaps he had been more sinned against than sinning, led on by others of firmer will and a more reckless nature than his own.

Strong in her loving trust, and eager to rest upon the least shadow of excuse, she thought she could trace in the tale to which she had just listened, the evidences of infirmity of purpose rather than of deliberate wrongdoing. Shall we blame her that she should thus cling so devotedly to the sinner, while all the time hating bitterly his sin? Nay! let us rather thank God that in some hearts, women's hearts especially, the Christ-like love which came "to seek and to save the lost," is yet to be found—a living active principle.

I will endeavour to tell the reader, in as few words as possible, the tale, which, under the chestnut trees at Baden Baden, took more than two hours to relate. It has before been said, that the last news Edith Vivian had heard of her half-brother was to the effect that he was on the point of proceeding from Spain to Mexico. The hopes, however, which had lured him to the New World proved illusory. The sailing vessel in which he had embarked was detained by

contrary winds and other disasters, and did not eventually reach her destination till after several months. In the mean time the Spanish ministry had changed (not a very unusual occurrence), and Ernest Vivian found upon his arrival in Mexico that the lucrative government appointment which had been promised to him at Puebla had been given away to another man. He lingered for some months in the colony by the advice of the friend at whose persuasion he had at first undertaken the journey, and in the hope of procuring other diplomatic employment. But in vain. Thus lingering, disappointment and dissipation combined, took sad effect upon his health, which was not too robust at any time. When about to re-embark from Vera Cruz for Europe, he was seized with a severe attack of yellow fever which laid him low for many weeks, and when he rose at length from his sick-bed, he was ruined alike in fortune and in constitution.

Too proud to write home and acquaint

his relatives in England with the failure of his hopes and schemes, and of his present poverty, he thus missed hearing of the legacy which his stepmother had left to him, though he had accidentally learnt the fact of her death from the papers.

Edith, and her friends for her, strove in vain to communicate with him. The letters which she had sent to him through his friends in Spain were returned to her unopened. Either those friends could not, or would not give further information respecting him, than that he had embarked for Mexico on board a vessel which was reported to have been lost at sea with all her passengers. And so, until that night before, when she had recognized him in the gambling room of the Kursaal, Edith had never been quite sure whether her only brother were alive or dead. And he, feeling or fancying that he had no claim upon the sister whose name he had in some sort disgraced, kept, as I said before, still proudly aloof. Possibly there might have been other and

more powerful reasons than those he acknowledged to induce him to do so. Indeed, during his stay in Mexico he had dropped his surname, and chosen to call himself only by his mother's name of O'Connor, which accounted perhaps for Edith's fruitless inquiries. Anyhow, he returned to Europe but not to England, and being now actually penniless, and even indebted to his Spanish friend for the loan of his passage-money, he gladly accepted an appointment at the court of Vienna, which, on a previous occasion, he had somewhat superciliously declined. At Vienna he had remained until within the last few months, and then he had once again resigned his appointment, and begun a wandering life amongst the gay cities of the continent. He was thinking of trying for employment as Queen's Messenger, he said ; the life of change and excitement would suit him better than being constantly tied to one place. To Edith he gave no other reason for his apparently capricious conduct ; but the scene at the *rouge et noir*

table last night, and his own worn and haggard look this morning, gave her the best clue to the truth.

Such were the leading facts of the tale he had to relate. There were, of course, many minor details, much filling-in of the broad outline, and Edith listened from first to last with deep attention, only interrupting him at times with expressions of interest and sympathy.

Then she had much to tell him in her turn.

The legacy left by Mrs. Vivian to her stepson, had accumulated by this time into a handsome sum; for although the money would have reverted to her in the event of his death, and Sir Edward Neville would long ago have had her act on this supposition, Edith had never quite despaired of seeing her vagrant brother again some day, and had insisted upon the legacy, interest and principal, being looked upon as a sum set aside for a sacred purpose. Not one farthing of the money should ever be spent upon herself,

whether he were alive or dead, she said. When she told him of those few thousand pounds, the very existence of which he had been ignorant of till then, she noted that his breath came once or twice in short quick gasps, and a strange expression of relief passed over his features. Up to that moment he had stood face to face with utter ruin, with disgrace, to end, perhaps, with death, and now he was safe, at least for a while.

Edith knew not so much as this, but she knew enough to make her heart beat loud and fast under its deep debt of gratitude to Him, who in His good Providence had guided her steps to this spot, in time, but only just in time, to save him from she knew not what, but from something she felt sure far worse than all that had gone before. Another day and it might have been too late. God only knows !

Pacing rapidly up and down the little sequestered path, they became conscious at last, that they were no longer alone in their

retreat. The time had slipped fast away, and the gay people of Baden were beginning to be astir now, and beginning too to watch with curious eye the handsome English lady and gentleman who were walking to and fro, in such a steady business-like fashion among the beautiful gardens where most persons were content to lounge quite slowly.

Edith was the first to observe this. "It must be getting late," she said, "and Kate promised to be here at one.

"Kate? Who is Kate?" he asked.

"Kate Wentworth; you remember her, don't you?"

"I seem as if I ought to know the name," he said, still in a half-questioning tone.

"Of course you ought to know it. You cannot have forgotten her. Little Kate—your pet and playfellow at Enderleigh—who never used to quarrel with you as I did sometimes."

"Yes, yes. I recollect now. Little Kate! And she is grown too out of all knowledge, I suppose—changed from a

child into a woman, as you have done ; and so I dare say I shall not remember her any more than I did you.”

But this was not the case.

When Kate came at last to meet them he knew her at once ; and she, too, it seemed, remembered him, for she came forward with a gesture of recognition and held out her hand with a cordial smile. These two loving women, you see, had resolved between themselves that there should be no coldness, no hanging back, on their side, nothing wanting on their part to win back the poor prodigal to his country and his home. Good Samaritans, as they were, they had come forth to that morning’s meeting with hearts full of kindly thoughts and feelings, ready to pour their wine and oil of sympathy and encouragement into the wounded spirit of the traveller who had wandered out of his way in the wilderness and had fallen among thieves. And they had their reward. Before they parted that morning, Edith had won from her brother a promise that he

would accompany or follow her back to England, "to look after his property," as she said. She counted much on this promise, indulging in the fond hope that, once at home again, she would continue to make his life at Enderleigh so pleasant, that he would not readily leave it again to resume his aimless wanderings. But she forgot that the restless longing for a life of liberty and excitement once yielded to, becomes sometimes a passion too strong to be resisted.

The Arab of the desert, we are told, will pine and sicken unto death, when compelled to take up his abode amongst the habitations of civilized men; he has even been known to leave his horses or camels in the hands of his employers when approaching a fortified city, and flee back into the wilderness, sooner than pass a single night within the imprisonment of its walls. And there was much of the untamed Ishmaelite in Ernest Vivian's composition.

Edith also succeeded, after much delicate

manceuvring, in pressing upon his acceptance a cheque for a considerable sum of money, as a gift or as a loan to be repaid at his convenience—with the one understanding (how arrived at she never could recall) that it should not be used at the gaming tables. She would have had him leave his present apartments and come as her guest to the Hotel de Bad; but this he declined to do. It seemed as though in the warmth of her generous love she could not do enough for the lost brother who had been found again that day.

Later in the afternoon, these three—Ernest Vivian and his sister and Kate Wentworth—were again walking together in the gardens of the Kursaal, now thronged with gaily dressed citizens of every age and nation, whilst Mr. and Mrs. Wentworth were better pleased to occupy a shady seat nearer to their hotel. For once in a way, Mr. Wentworth felt himself free to enjoy a little quiet rest and an uninterrupted chat with his wife. Unworldly and unsuspicuous as

he was, the doubt never crossed his mind for a moment whether it were advisable to allow 'his girls' to appear in public at such a place as Baden, under the escort of their present companion.

As for Edith herself, if her brother had been the veriest reprobate on the face of the earth she would have resented the slightest attempt to separate her from his companionship, on that first day at least. But to do Ernest Vivian justice, with all his faults he had never lived such a life as rendered him unfit for the society of pure and high-minded women like herself. Low as he had fallen in his own esteem, he had not as yet lost his belief in woman's goodness. The example of his dearly loved stepmother, still fresh in his memory and sacred to his heart, had been to him as a talisman of safety when thrown, as he had too often been, into the society of the most worthless of her sex.

Still, as they walked up and down the now crowded avenues of the Kursaal, or rested in some sheltered spot underneath

the trees, he received many a glance or nod of recognition from casual acquaintances of either sex, whom he would scarcely have cared to introduce to his sister.

Some of these he acknowledged with a cool bow; others he frowned away when they would have made a nearer approach. But once, when they turned suddenly at the end of the walk, they came face to face with the handsome officer and his wife, whom Edith had watched with so much interest in the gambling-room on the previous night.

These two were friends of Ernest's. It was too late to avoid them, even if he had wished to do so; but perhaps he did not. The husband was an officer, and in the world's sense of the term, a gentleman. The wife a perfect lady by nature and by birth; and so, instead of simply bowing as he passed, he stopped at once, and introduced Edith to Colonel and Mrs. Lyle as his sister, whom he had not seen for more than ten years.

Edith could be distant and reserved enough at times, under some circumstances and with *some* people, but she hardly knew what it was to feel shy; and as in Mrs. Lyle there was much of the genial courtesy which belongs to real refinement, they felt mutually attracted towards each other.

“Your brother is an old friend of ours, Miss Vivian; my husband knew him first at Madrid, twelve years ago.” And Mrs. Lyle, as she said this, held Edith’s hand in a warm clasp, which Edith as cordially returned. It was strange, but standing as they did thus, Edith, young as she was, felt instinctively that she was by far the stronger of the two. It seemed quite natural that she should assume the place of protector to the pale, delicate-looking woman before her; quite natural that Mrs. Lyle, who was nearly old enough to be her mother, should cling to her for sympathy and friendly support. She had not in the least forgotten the little scene in the gambling-room the night before. The wife’s

almost pitiful appeal to the husband, the husband's angry repulse; nor had she forgotten how even then, she had longed to go up and speak to that poor lady, and try to show her in some way that she wished to be her friend. Perhaps, too, Mrs. Lyle had seen those kind, dark eyes watching her so compassionately, for all that her own had never seemed to leave her husband's face.

Edith in after days became tolerably intimate with the Lyles, but she never cordially liked the Colonel. She never quite forgave him for that angry look which his wife had forgotten half an hour afterwards; she never could efface from her memory the picture of the man as she had first seen him sitting at the *rouge et noir* table at Baden. So much there is in first impressions.

Miss Vivian and her new companion strolled on together a few steps in advance of the rest of their party. Mrs. Lyle told her that she and her husband had lately returned from India, where his regiment

had been stationed for some years. Colonel Lyle had sold out on account of her health, which had been much affected by the climate. She had suffered a good deal from the homeward voyage; and the intense heat of the Red Sea, and the violent storms in the Mediterranean, had told so much upon her already exhausted strength, that Colonel Lyle, upon their arrival at Malta, had decided to stop there instead of going on to Southampton. A week's rest had in some measure recruited her, and then they had crossed to Naples, and travelled by easy stages through Italy and Switzerland to Baden.

“Were they going to make any stay at Baden?” Edith asked.

Mrs. Lyle did not know; they had already been there nearly a month, and might stay for some weeks longer. The Colonel liked the place, and thought it would be beneficial to her to drink the waters. But *she* was longing to be at home again, longing to see her own darling little girl

who was at school in England. She wished now that they had gone home at once.

Edith's quick ear caught the heavy sigh with which the last words were accompanied, and readily guessed its cause. By way of turning the conversation, she asked in what part of India the Lyles had been stationed.

"In Bengal, close to Allahabad, for the last four years," the lady answered.

"Allahabad!" Oh, then perhaps you knew the young lady who has married my cousin, George Neville. Miss Gray, I think her name was?"

"Know her? Know my own dear little niece, Lucy Gray? Why, of course I do, and love her almost like my own child. She went out with me to India four years ago, when she was only sixteen, and lived at our house till her family joined her at Allahabad. And so dear good George Neville is your cousin. I am so glad, for we shall have all the better reason for being friends now, Miss Vivian."

And she turned to acquaint her husband with the discovery she had made. Kate, in the meantime, having been walking with Ernest and Colonel Lyle, had contrived to ascertain from the latter gentleman, that he belonged to the Lyles of the New Forest, a family who had lived there for centuries, and were well known to all the surrounding gentry. Some of them she knew were old friends of her father's. And so, upon the strength of these two coincidences, the acquaintance thus casually commenced, promised to ripen to some degree of intimacy.

Anglo-Indians are wont to complain of the coldness and reserve they meet with amongst their countrymen at home, but in this case the charge would have been unjust. During the remainder of the time that the Wentworths spent at Baden (and Mr. Wentworth and Edith contrived to stay there two whole days longer than they had originally intended), they saw much of their new friends. Riding parties, pic-nics, excursions to Eberstein, to the Mourgthal, to

the Black Forest, were planned for every day, in all of which Colonel and Mrs. Lyle were invited to accompany them.

There was a reason for these lengthened excursions, filling up, as they did, every day, and nearly all day long; and Mrs. Lyle and Edith, without a word said on either side, perfectly understood each other's motives. They were two fellow-conspirators in a very innocent plot, the object of which was to provide, at all risk of fatigue to themselves, a constant variety of wholesome amusement for the gentlemen of their party. *Anything* to keep them, even for a few hours, from the terrible fascination of the gaming-tables. Ah me! I wonder how many poor wives and sisters have so plotted for their nearest and dearest at Baden and elsewhere, ever since the world began, and not always with such good success as did the two ladies of whom I speak. Colonel Lyle and his friend, young Vivian, must indeed have been hardened gamesters if they could have found in the stifling atmosphere of the

roulette-room, greater attractions than in the free air of the mountains and the lovely scenery of the surrounding country, not to speak of a greater charm still, in the society of the graceful and intelligent women who accompanied them on these excursions.

However, willingly or unwillingly, the two gentlemen yielded themselves captive to the fascinating influences brought to bear upon them. The potent spell of the *trente et quarante* table was broken for a while; and the gaming-rooms were deserted, or, at any rate, only visited at rare intervals during the next few days.

The evenings, when the ladies were not too fatigued, were enlivened with music. Edith sang, as she did everything else, well; and yet her brother, who was an enthusiastic lover of music, seemed to care even less for her finished songs, than for Kate's less artistic performances. It seemed as though he could never weary of hearing the latter's fresh young voice singing the simple ballads of his own native country.

Something might, perhaps, be owing to the charm of association.

And so the time passed pleasantly enough, and

“ All went merry as a marriage bell.”

But even the pleasantest hours must end at last. Mr. Wentworth’s inexorable duty began to call him back to the New Forest; and, from the tone of Aunt Fanny’s letters, it was supposed that she was growing weary of the monotony of Aix-la-Chapelle.

One morning, about a week later, the happy little party at Baden was broken up. Edith and Kate expressed to each other a kind of sad satisfaction at the fact that the rain, which had kept off during the entire week, was falling in a perfect deluge as they took their places in the railway-carriage *en route* for Heidelberg and the Rhine. To Edith’s great delight, however, her brother accompanied them as far as Mayence, from whence he purposed travelling to England by way of Paris. So, after all, it was only the Lyles who were left behind.

Miss Vivian and her friends met with no further adventures on their homeward journey. Aunt Fanny was waiting to join them at Aix, and after three more days of quiet travelling, they were all safely landed again on English shores.

Thus ended the pleasant little trip to Baden and the Rhine.

If not so famous as Titmarsh's journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo, it was at least as fertile of interest and amusement to the parties concerned. To their dying day, Edith and Kate were wont to declare that their one month's ramble on the Continent had been the happiest holiday of their whole lives.

* * * * *

Farewell, bright valleys of the Rhine, and fir-clad hills of the Black Forest ! We, too, take our leave of you here, and would fain turn back for one last lingering glance at your familiar beauties ; for in the pages of this story we shall see you again no more.

Henceforth our tale lies nearer home.

CHAPTER VII.

“ HAUGHTON MANOR, in the county of Gloucestershire, the residence of Sir Edward Kerrison Neville, Bart., situated on the banks of the Avon, about ten miles from Bristol, in a richly wooded and picturesque country. The present mansion, surrounded by extensive deer-park and pleasure-grounds, was erected in 1796; the left wing was partially destroyed by fire, and restored in 1820. The present baronet succeeded to the title in 1828, on the death of his first cousin once removed, Sir George Neville, of Enderleigh Priory, Hampshire. He married, in 1824, Sybil, only daughter and heiress of the Reverend Lawrence Morton, Vicar of Westbourne, in this county.

She died in 1840, leaving six children. Heir, his son George, born 1825. Cards to view the Manor House and its valuable gallery of pictures, may be obtained by application to the Steward, or at the Lodge Gates."

Such were the high-sounding and pretentious terms in which the residence of Sir Edward Neville was described in one of the guide-books for the county of Gloucestershire. A description which invariably caused the "heir, his son George," or the heir's younger brother Harry, to throw aside the book with a gesture of impatience and disgust, whenever their eyes chanced to light upon it. Haughton Manor was, in truth, a moderate sized, somewhat old-fashioned, and by no means uncomfortable country house, well suited (had it been kept in better repair) for a gentleman's residence, but nothing more. "The extensive pleasure-grounds and deer-park" inclusive (why a deer-park it was difficult to say, as no one ever remembered to have seen any deer

there), covered together scarcely so much as two dozen acres of ground. The left *wing* of the house, as it was pompously called, had consisted, before the fire, of offices and stables only ; but when rebuilt in 1820, a few bachelor's bed-rooms had been added. Had any travellers, on the strength of the notice in the guide-book, applied, as directed, for cards of admission, at the lodge gates (the race of Haughton stewards having long since been extinct), they would have found the so-called picture-gallery to be a long, narrow passage, or corridor, containing two Correggios (doubtful?), one Teniers, two copies of Wilkie, a Benjamin West, a good deal of worthless rubbish, and some water-coloured sketches of Turner's, which were really good. But within the memory of the younger members, the family at the Manor House had never been disturbed by any such visitors.

So, too, Sybil, only child of the Reverend Lawrence Morton, a poor country clergyman, had been heiress of little else than

her father's talent and her mother's beauty, though the Baronet, then only plain Edward Neville, had thought these a rich inheritance enough in that halcyon time, when he had ridden over to Westbourne Vicarage day after day to woo and to win her as his bride. He used in after years to speak of such early marriages as mistakes, but his own was the happiest mistake he ever made.

In one point only the guide-book had spoken the truth. The Manor House *was* beautifully situated on the banks of the Avon ; and the view from the terrace overlooking the shrubberies, which sloped down to the very water's edge, the windings of the river itself, and the richly wooded landscape on the opposite shores, formed as fair a specimen of English rural scenery, as the eye could well wish to look upon.

In spite of the virtuous indignation of his two sons, Sir Edward Neville was content, nay, more, was well pleased, that the paragraph in the guide-book, grossly exaggerated as it was, should remain unaltered.

It was something to take his place, even in print, among the aristocrats and landed gentry of the county. All his life the Baronet had been a comparatively poor man, and all his life he had been striving to cheat society into the belief that he was a rich one. The pomps and vanities of the world of wealth and fashion (the only world he thought of or acknowledged) had been the idols of his heart from his boyhood upward. Above all, to hold rank amongst the 'county families' of Gloucestershire, had been the darling ambition of his life, and long years of unqualified snubbing from his more aristocratic neighbours, had not yet sufficed to cure him of his longing. True, the name of Neville was a good one; the Heralds' Office had been indulgent to his weakness, and permitted him to quarter the white bear and ragged staff of the house of Warwick in his armorial bearings. But alas! on the other hand, his father had been a merchant in the good old city of Bristol; it was even rumoured that Sir Edward himself, in earlier

years, had ‘touched the pitch and been defiled.’ And this was an offence hard to be forgiven in the eyes of the Lady Clara Vere de Veres and others, whose ancestors, as all the world knows, had come in with the Conqueror, and who *boasted* of never having done so much as an hour’s work of head or hand in all their lives. And so the poor Baronet was just suffered to hover on the confines of the noble circles in which he would fain have taken his place as a rightful member; endured, but not welcomed, in the ball-room and the hunting-field by men who held out the right hand of fellowship to his sons, George and Harry, just because, in their manly independence, they held ‘tuft-hunting’ to be a sin against human nature, and their own self-respect.

The tidings of his father’s illness, which had awaited Captain Neville upon his return from Königswinter, had not been exaggerated. The Baronet was, indeed, sick unto death. The dire stroke of paralysis, so long silently dreaded by his family, had

fallen at last. And when the young officer, after about six-and-thirty hours of incessant travelling, reached Haughton at a late hour on the following night, he found his father alive, indeed, but stretched prostrate upon a bed of sickness, from which, in all human probability, he would never rise again. So he had lain ever since he had been first seized with the paralytic stroke now nearly four days ago. He had not moved or spoken once in all that time, though, for several reasons, the physicians were inclined to think that he was not insensible to what was going on around him.

The first unmistakable sign of returning consciousness was given when Harry, kneeling by the bedside, implored his father to speak to, or to notice him. A spasm passed over his whole face. Into the dreamy, half-closed eyes came the first glad look of recognition; there was an endeavour as if to speak, and the cold hand which Harry had raised in both his own, made a faint effort to return the warm clasp in which it was

held. The poor fellow broke down altogether when they told him this was the first sign his father had made.

With all his faults, Sir Edward Neville had ever been to him an affectionate parent. Of the six sons and daughters who had been born to him, Harry had ever been his favourite child ; perhaps because in beauty and talent he most closely resembled his lost mother. The father had ever had what he thought his second son's interest at heart, though he had sometimes striven to further those interests, in ways which that son could neither appreciate or approve. Since his return from India this had been more than ever the case. Much disparity of opinion and principle had given rise to an unfortunate coldness between them ; it was scarcely to be expected that two persons so materially different as were the Baronet and his son, could live together in perfect harmony. And yet deep down in Harry Neville's heart there was a warm affection for his father, which all the latter's worldliness

and self-seeking could never quite extinguish.

And now, as he looked on that strong, handsome form, which in his boyhood he had ever been wont to consider as the model of all that was manly and excellent, lying there helpless as an infant, the coldness of the past weeks and months melted away like a dream, and the old boyish love came back again with tenfold power. He pressed one kiss upon the cold, damp forehead, and hurried from the room, utterly unmanned. The fatigue and excitement of the journey home, undertaken, as it had been, under the pressure of extreme anxiety, had told upon his nerves. All day long, too, the remembrance of the many hard things he had said and thought of his sick father had been torturing his brain; and now, one glance at the suffering face in that darkened room had done the rest. A few minutes after, when his sister Minnie followed him, and begged admittance to his room, she found the strong young soldier, who

would have faced the fire of the Redan without flinching, stretched on the sofa, and sobbing like a frightened child.

It was soon over, such weakness with him was but the exception of an hour; firmness and self-control were the habit of his life. Very soon the passionate outburst of grief had spent itself, and before morning broke, Harry was his own strong self once more.

During the protracted season of anxiety which followed, his calmness never failed again. For many weeks, for months, indeed, Sir Edward lay in much the same state, hovering between life and death; and all that time, by day, and often, too, by night, the young officer was his patient and devoted nurse. Though his own health was none too robust, he seemed almost insensible to fatigue; and all the impatience and querulousness of the invalid never drew from his lips one word of murmur or complaint. He felt, in his present self-accusing mood, as though there were a long outstanding debt against him, and now was his time to pay it off.

And he had his reward, for (so said the physicians), under God, it was owing to the son's constant and unremitting care, that the father did at last recover. For Sir Edward Neville did not die. Gradually, but by such slow degrees, that to those who watched constantly, they were scarcely perceptible, there came an improvement in his state. Consciousness had never been dormant for long, and his intellect was soon restored as keen as ever. There was scarcely any noticeable disfigurement of face or feature, and but a trifling indistinctness of speech ; but so long as he lived one side would remain in part helpless and paralysed. He had had a narrow escape, the doctor said, it was the second warning ; let him take care, another stroke must of necessity be fatal.

To Harry it was happiness enough to note even this partial restoration of his father's health and strength ; but his crowning joy was in the hope, faint and feeble, indeed, but not altogether unfounded, that with

that restoration had come a more softened tone of heart and feeling. “Pray for me, Harry, I am not fit to die,” the sick man had said, one night in the darkness, holding his boy’s hand fast. And on bended knees Harry answered that appeal. And that night, and many a night after, he prayed that the awful peril through which his father had passed, might lead to the dawning of a better hope, the beginning of a new life of faith and holiness, which even the grave itself should have no power to end. I suppose there are those amongst the world’s votaries who say, or in their secret hearts *think*, that it is an unmanly thing to pray. To me it has always seemed, of all things, the most manly, to see a man, strong in all that concerns this world, strong in all his dealings with his fellow-men, cast himself upon his knees, owning himself weak and helpless as a child before his God.

On Christmas Day Sir Edward Neville was able to join his family for the first time

at dinner; and on the same day, before the dinner was half over, poor Harry left the table almost fainting. More than one person had noticed that for some time past he had looked more ill than his father. In truth, his nerves and strength had been severely taxed. The long period of protracted anxiety had been very trying, more particularly as, added to this, there had been almost constant fatigue, and frequent want of rest. Now, when his father might safely be considered out of all danger, the reaction had come; and unless timely precautions were taken, he was in a fair way to have a bad illness himself. The doctor, of course, recommended change of scene and variety of occupation and companionship, and it was soon settled that Captain Neville should take a month's trip to Paris, or pay another visit to his Cumberland friends, the Normans.

“ Mary,” Sir Edward said to his only unmarried daughter, a day or two after Christmas, “ write and ask Edith Vivian to come

and stay here next week. I want to see her, and she will do me good. Harry will be off on Saturday, and then there will be nobody of any sense left for me to speak to."

Poor Mary Neville was accustomed to such speeches from her father, and did not mind them *much*, luckily for her.

"I don't care about having that cross old Fanny," he continued ; "nor do I suppose she would care to come ; you may ask her, if you like. But Edith's a good girl, and will come, I know, if you say I want her, and make it a personal favour to me as an invalid."

So Mary Neville wrote according to her father's orders. "I am afraid you will find it very dull here, as poor papa is not able to bear much excitement yet," she said, in her rather formal little note, for poor Minnie had always been more or less afraid of her stately cousin, the mistress of Enderleigh. "But you are so kind, I do not think you will mind this, and you always say you do

not care much for gaiety. I am very sorry, though, that Harry will be away again during your visit; it seems as though you never were to see my dear soldier brother. But, poor fellow, he is so terribly knocked up with his constant attendance upon papa, that the doctor has ordered him to go away somewhere for a month. Papa hopes, however, that you will not mind this, but will come and be his companion for a few days while Harry is gone, he will miss him so much. I am too stupid to be able to amuse him," continued poor Minnie, growing more natural as she allowed her affectionate feelings to come into fuller play; "and the days seem very long to him now that he cannot walk about at all, or even drive so much as he used to do. So do come, dear Edith, if you can, and mind you bring your beautiful dog with you, that you have so often told me about. I forget what his name is, but I do so long to see him."

So wrote Minnie Neville, and Edith's

answer was to the effect that she would be at Haughton without fail early in the following week. She should be so glad if she could be of any use to her poor uncle, she said, and hoped to be able to amuse him a little; at least she would do her best. She was very sorry to hear that she should again miss seeing Captain Neville (arrant hypocrite that she was, seeing that her first thought on reading Minnie's letter had been, "What a lucky chance, for I *could* not have gone if he had been at home"), and still more sorry to learn the cause of his absence; but she hoped change of air would be of great service to him, and that he would return home quite well and strong, etc. etc.

And so the invitation was accepted in the same frank spirit in which it had been given. The Baronet was a shrewd man, and understood Edith Vivian better than she thought. He had struck the right chord in her nature when he had asked her to come as a personal favour to himself. To be of *use* to any one in the world, even to one who had

not always used her well, was a temptation too strong for her to resist; and for the first time in her life Edith looked forward to her approaching visit to Haughton, with a feeling of satisfaction, if not of positive pleasure.

CHAPTER VIII.

ONE day, about a week afterwards, Miss Vivian might have been seen standing in the library at Haughton Manor. She had not long arrived, and her grey horses still stood pawing at the door, making considerable havoc of the newly-gravelled drive. For once in a way the young lady had travelled thither *en grande dame*, bringing her carriage and servants with her, really because she thought that the easy, swinging motion of her town-built chariot would better suit her uncle's invalid state, than either his own dog-cart or the rickety old family coach.

“I am improving, Uncle Edward, am I not?” she said, laughing, as she laid her

hand on the back of the Baronet's chair. "You will make a grand lady of me some day, after your own heart, and you will hear of me as not being able to go anywhere for a single day without my carriage and my maid."

"Thank you, my dear," Sir Edward answered; not a very relevant reply, it might seem at first, but, as I said before, he was a shrewd man, and understood her better than she thought.

"But to be serious," she continued; "the carriage is your's, Uncle Edward, while I am here. Harrison has found first-rate quarters in the village, and will come up here for your orders every day. And when we are very good, you can take Minnie or me for a drive."

Her guardian nodded to her, but made no other answer this time. Certainly, when Edith Vivian was intent upon bestowing a favour, she knew the right way of doing it. She went on talking for a little while in rather an excited way, for the change in

her uncle's appearance had shocked her a good deal. Mary Neville noticed this, and noticed, too, that her father grew a little flushed, and eager in his manner of answering her many questions. Whereupon, under pretence of dressing for dinner, she soon carried Edith off to her own room. As they were passing along the corridor, she paused before the open door of another room.

“You must come in here a moment, Edith,” she said; “there is really no hurry about dinner, only I thought papa seemed getting tired, and there is something here for you to see. I want you to look at this new portrait of Harry. It is the last one he has had taken, and it is so good.”

So saying, she ushered Edith into a small, pleasant room, which, from various unmistakable signs, was evidently sacred to the use of the said Harry himself when at home. On a table, in one corner of the room, more than one cigar-case was lying; and, worse still, side-by-side with these, lay, in all its flagrant iniquity, a handsome meerschaum

pipe. On another table stood an open desk, with some papers strewn round it. On one chair a walking-cane and a wide-awake hat had been thrown carelessly down. On another a parcel of new books, still half covered by their paper wrapper, had been left. Altogether the room struck Edith as looking very untidy, considering its owner was away. But then, as she had known for a long time, the spirit of neatness and order was by no means the pervading genius at Haughton Manor. She had only time to cast a glance at these things in passing, before she was summoned to admire Captain Neville's photograph likeness. "It was taken just before he went abroad last autumn," Mary said. No need to tell Edith that. She had recognized in an instant the whole style of a certain brown travelling suit, which she had good reason to remember. The young officer was represented in an easy sitting position, and by his side a large greyhound was standing, with his head upon his knee. How well she remembered to have seen

Rupert stand for hours together in that attitude, looking up into his friend's face. It was really an excellent likeness. Captain Neville made a good photograph, in spite of his blue eyes and light hair. Edith felt that she would have known it amongst a thousand others, and she stood looking at it for some time, wondering in her own heart whether she was glad or sorry that her cousin Harry had gone to Cumberland.

Mary was pleased and flattered at the evident interest which Edith took in her brother's picture. "Isn't it very good?" she asked at length, when she thought her cousin must have looked at it long enough.

"Very," Edith answered, decidedly, forgetting, in the impulse of the moment, that she could not be supposed to be any judge of the likeness. "It is a beautiful picture, at least," she added a moment after; for, of all people, Mary Neville was about the last to whom she would have thought of betraying her secret.

"Oh, I forgot you would not know

whether it is like, for you have not seen Harry for so many years, but I hope you will see him again before very long.” And as she said this, there was a sly smile on Mary’s lips ; for she, too, had her own little secret, which she had no intention of imparting to Edith just at that moment. “Papa would have liked Harry to have been taken in his uniform, but he would not consent. It is so odd, officers never seem to like to wear their uniform if they can help it,” continued Mary Neville, in her quiet, matter-of-fact way, as if she were propounding some quite new and original theory. “Papa has a duplicate coloured copy,” she added, after another pause, “but this one is going out to George in India.”

This one still meant her brother’s likeness, but Edith was looking at that no longer. With eyes very wide open, and her heart beating fast, she was staring—literally *staring*—at another picture, which was hanging a little to the right of Captain Neville’s portrait.

“Oh, that is nothing!” exclaimed Mary, following the direction of her gaze. “At least, I mean it is only the picture of some place abroad, somewhere on the Rhine, I think.”

Nothing was it? Nothing to Mary Neville, perhaps, but a good deal to Edith Vivian. It was simply a resurrection; nothing more nor less than her old pencil-sketch of the Drachenfels, which she had long since thought buried in a watery grave. There was no mistake about it, she knew almost every stroke by heart; for a duplicate copy which she had taken after the loss of this one, was even now lying in Mrs. Wentworth’s scrap-book at Lyndford. And if further proof had been wanting, there were her own initials, E. M. V. in the left-hand corner; but these were so small, and so cunningly introduced amongst the twisted roots of a tree, that no eye, perhaps, but her own could have discerned them. The sketch was hers without a doubt; but how in the world it had found its way to

Haughton, to be hanging there, framed and glazed, on the walls of her cousin's room, was indeed a mystery. Of course, Harry must have brought it back himself; but she could not conceive how he had ever become possessed of it, for she had no eyes, no thought for anything but her dog's safety the day of Rupert's adventure at Bonn, and had never even noted that her drawing was rescued too. But the secret which so puzzled Miss Vivian will be no mystery to the reader, who doubtless remembers Captain Neville's subsequent visit to the little arbour, and his appropriation of the sketch, which the owner, in a moment of abstraction, had thought fit to throw away.

“Oh, but Aunt Minnie!” exclaimed little Fanny Price, the Baronet's favourite grandchild, a pretty, precocious little girl of about seven years old, who had followed them into the room. “Uncle Harry doesn't call that nothing, I can tell you. I think *somebody* must have given it to him when he

was abroad," the child added, nodding her head in a very knowing way; "for he is always looking at it; and oh! he was *so* cross the other day, when Martha broke the glass *ever* such a little bit."

Aunt Minnie laughed, and said Uncle Harry was a naughty boy, and a sad flirt, she was afraid, and Edith tried to laugh too, but she was wondering all the while whether her companion could see her tell-tale face. The feeling of honest pleasure with which she had listened to the child's unconscious words, had sent the hot blood rushing up to her very temples, and her lips were actually trembling with nervous excitement, but not for all the world would she have had those words unsaid.

She *was* remembered still, then. In the midst even of his father's illness, he had not forgotten those happy hours at Bonn, and the last eventful day at Königswinter. He had told her he should not forget it, and it seemed he had kept his word. No doubt it was pleasant to be so thought of, so re-

membered, though it was foolish to care about it at all. Should she ever see him again? she wondered, and once more she began to think it was almost a pity her cousin Harry had gone away to Cumberland.

But the momentary weakness was soon checked. "It is much better as it is," she said to herself, as she turned to leave the room, "for if he had been at home, I *could* not have come to Haughton."

Miss Fanny Price followed her into her own room, which Susan had already reduced to a very considerable state of disorder in the process of unpacking her mistress's things. The little girl was an old friend and favourite of Edith's; and being, moreover, the eldest grandchild and the pet of the house, she considered herself at full liberty to go in and out whenever and wherever she pleased.

It had caused the Baronet a considerable amount of vexation when some ten years back his eldest and handsomest daughter, Laura, chose to ally herself with a man of

the plebeian name of Price. Much rather would he have seen her enter, even on sufferance, one of the county families. “She might have married whom she would,” he used to say, “and the Prices were little better than farmers, I assure you.” They had farmed their own land for years, and made it answer too. This seemed to be the crime, not the farming their own land, but the making it answer. But the “man Tom Price” was unquestionably a gentleman, albeit a farmer; and Miss Laura Neville was in love with him. She had a will of her own, inherited from her father. Moreover, there was plenty of money in the case, and so, after a faint show of reluctance, Sir Edward gave his consent, and never had cause to regret it afterwards. Little Fanny, or Fairy Fan, as she was often called, half lived at Haughton, and was almost the only person in the establishment capable of managing her grandpapa. She was a good little child on the whole, however, though considerably spoilt.

She now proceeded nominally to assist, but in reality to hinder Susan very much in her task of unpacking and arranging Edith's wardrobe. And when she had by her efforts decidedly increased the untidy aspect of the room, she grew tired of that amusement, and perched herself on a chair at the window, thereby crushing the curtain and blind, and smearing the window-panes much more than was at all necessary or agreeable. The window was open, in spite of the keen, frosty air. Snow had come in with the New Year; and the narrow strip of grass—thickly planted with trees—which separated the Manor House from the high road was covered with a sheet of dazzling white. The leafless trees, bending beneath their beautiful burden of snow and hoar frost, looked weird and strange in the growing twilight. It was a pretty sight, and Fanny seemed thoroughly to enjoy it; but Edith, half afraid of her falling out, was obliged to keep near her. The rooms consecrated to her use during her visit were

amongst what the guide-book would probably have called the “state apartments” of Haughton Manor. They were situated in the front of the house on the first floor just above, and to the right of the entrance-hall. From the windows of her bedroom, therefore, the whole of the carriage drive, as far as the lodge gate, was clearly visible ; and glimpses of the high road even, could be seen through the belt of trees in the plantation.

Miss Vivian was still standing by little Fanny, holding her lightly by the skirt of her dress, when the sound of a horse’s hoofs was heard approaching on the crisp, frosty road. Directly after the rider—whatever he was—came cantering along the drive, and reined in his horse at the hall-door ; and at the same moment a groom appeared from somewhere out of the darkness and took possession of the bridle.

“There’s Uncle Harry!” exclaimed Fanny Price, triumphantly, and with a jerk that nearly dragged her skirt out of Edith’s hand.

Edith could hardly believe her own ears. “Uncle Harry!” she almost screamed. “Fanny, what do you mean? Uncle Harry is in Cumberland.”

“Oh no, he isn’t,” was the cool reply. “They couldn’t have him there, ’cause they’ve got the scarlet fever. So he’s going to France instead, but not till next week. I heard grandpa ask him to stay and see you,” the young lady continued, with one of her knowing nods, “and he said he would.”

The information was given in far too collected and straightforward a way to admit of a doubt regarding its truth, and poor Edith Vivian stood for a moment almost paralysed with astonishment and dismay. Harry Neville it was,—it must be. It was too dark to distinguish features, but there was something in the easy grace with which the rider flung himself from the saddle; something, too, in the whole cut of his figure and clothes, and especially of that everlasting wide-awake hat, which stamped

him unquestionably as the Harry Neville she had seen and known on the Rhine. And if she had had a doubt, the sound of his voice the moment after would have set it at rest.

“Who’s carriage was that I saw at the door as I passed along the road an hour ago?” he asked.

“Miss Vivian’s, Captain,” the man replied; “she arrived at three o’clock.”

Neither Miss Vivian nor the groom could hear the purport of Captain Neville’s next words, which were muttered under his breath, and which were in reality something to this effect. “Insufferable pride! She can’t even come to a sick house without filling it up with her pomps and vanities.” But if Edith had heard them, I think she could have afforded to smile at the accusation, it was so utterly untrue.

The door was opened, and a blaze of light from the hall fell full on the face which Edith had learnt to know so well. Instinctively she drew back into the shadow of the

curtain, thinking, on the impulse of the moment, that she must be as visible to him as he was to her.

But Miss Price had no idea of letting her uncle off so easily.

“Uncle Harry! Uncle Harry!” the child shouted, making such a spring forward in her excitement that Edith was constrained, at all hazards, to take hold of her dress again.

“Hallo, you sprite!” was the answer; “You’re there, are you?”

“Yes, I’m here,” replied the young lady, with some decision of manner. “Uncle Harry,”—this more confidentially,—“come and have a good game of romps in the library. It’s all right. Grandpa isn’t there, he’s gone to have his nap upstairs.”

“I can’t, Miss. I’ve got letters to write in my own room before post time, and don’t want you. What in the world are you doing up there?”

“Oh, I’m with Aunt Edith. She’s come. She’s getting ready for dinner.”

As it still wanted nearly two hours to the rather early dinner-hour of the Manor House, Captain Neville probably thought, in the bitterness of his spirit, that Miss Vivian had allowed herself quite time enough for the important operation of dressing. “And I suppose you are helping her after your own fashion,” was what he said, however. “Well, don’t plague her, as you do me, that’s all, you puss!” and then he went into the house.

“Aunt Edith, *do* I plague you?” asked the little girl, with a pretty, wistful look into her companion’s face, as Edith closed the window and turned away. (Fanny had been sorely puzzled for some time, to find out the relationship between Miss Vivian and herself, but had thus settled it at last to her own satisfaction.)

“No, my pet,” said Edith, kissing her; “but it will be your tea-time soon, and then you must go away.”

Far from feeling Fanny to have been a plague up to that moment, she felt herself

to be under a deep debt of gratitude to her ; for had it not been for the child's chattering, she might never have heard or noticed the warning hoofs ; and her cousin might have dismounted and entered the house, and she been none the wiser. She would probably never have known that he was at Haughton till they met at dinner-time ; and then there would have been a scene,—the thing of all others which Miss Vivian hated, and which, if she knew anything about him, she thought Captain Neville must hate too. Thanks to Fanny, this might now be warded off. She had two hours the start of him ; and it was hard if, with her own woman's wit and ready tact, she could not hit upon some plan of action. But there was no time to lose, something must be done at once ; and in the preliminary process of thinking out what that something should be, the presence of a little, restless, inquisitive child was decidedly a hindrance rather than a help. The lady's maid, too, seemed very much in the way, just then.

“ Susan !” said Miss Vivian, as she seated herself in an arm-chair beside the flickering fire. “ I would rather you would light the candles now, and leave me alone a little while. I will ring when I want you again, and you can finish the unpacking after dinner.”

Susan obeyed in a silent fashion, as was her usual habit.

So there was one of the two disposed of. Edith might have found more trouble in dispensing with her other companion’s presence, only, as Susan was leaving the room, a knock was heard at the door, and after the knock came a voice which said, “ Miss Fanny, your tea’s quite ready, and ’Arriet said you was to be sure and come directly, and not tease your *Hant*.”

“ Poor little mite !” said Edith, drawing Fanny to her, and giving her another kiss, “ everybody seems to think you tease, don’t they ?”

“ I ’spect I do, sometimes,” replied that young woman, with a sly look. “ But

never mind, Aunt Edith, I shan't be gone long ; I'll come back directly I've had my tea," she added, utterly ignoring the possibility that her society might not be so very much wanted.

“ Where ignorance is bliss,
'Tis folly to be (*other*) wise ! ”

She left the door wide open, of course ; and Edith, as she rose to shut it after her, had the satisfaction of hearing a manly footstep, which she had learnt to recognize so easily a few months back, come up the stairs and along the corridor, and so into the room where Edith had been taken to see the photograph, and which was known to the household by the name of “ Captain 'Arry's study.”

“ Fire out again ! ” he exclaimed, in a clear, sharp voice to the housemaid, who still lingered in the passage. “ How many times am I to speak of the same thing ? ” Many men might have sworn at her for less, but this was not “ Captain 'Arry's ” way. His brother-officers used to say that

Neville had never been known to swear but once in his life, and that was years before, after the battle of Sobraon, when he saw a Pandy kick back a magnificent wounded Sikh into the Sutlej, after he had just managed to drag himself up the river-bank. The indignant young officer knocked the Pandy down, waded through the shallow water, and saved the Sikh from drowning; but the poor man died on the bank five minutes after.

Now he contented himself and 'aired' his temper by slamming the door with a considerable amount of noise. Miss Vivian closed her own more softly, and then returned to her arm-chair by the fire to think quietly, now she was alone, over what she had better do, or rather over how it had better be done. For what she had to do was plain enough. She had to communicate in some way to her cousin, before dinner-time, the fact of her identity with the heroine of the Königs-winter adventure. The question that troubled her most, was how the communication

could best be made. One plan after another presented itself, and was dismissed in turn. At one time she thought of sending for her cousin Mary, and taking her into her confidence ; but all the pride of her nature revolted against the humiliating confession, which this proceeding would involve. Then she thought she would write to him ; but who would take the letter ? she could not bear to send it through a servant. At last, as the time began to slip away, she became almost desperate, and was half resolved on the bold measure of knocking at Harry Neville's door, and letting him see with his own eyes that *she* was the rich cousin whom he had, all his life long, shunned and scorned. Whether her courage would have held good or not, when it came to the point, remains an open question ; for at that moment the touch of something very cold against her fingers made her jump violently, and gave a new direction to her thoughts. She looked down, and there was Prince Rupert,

whose very existence she had for the time forgotten, standing on his hind legs beside her, his paws laid on her lap, his cold nose thrust into her hand, and his eyes fixed, with a tender, wistful expression, on her face. Clever dog! he had seen that something was amiss with his mistress, she would not have sat so still and thoughtful else; and so he had uncoiled himself from his comfortable corner on the hearthrug, and had come to ask her, in his own 'doggy' fashion, if he could not help her out of her difficulties. Help her? of course he could. At the first glance she saw in Rupert the very missing link she had been in search of all the time. Her "Prince of Cavaliers," as she was so fond of calling him, was the one creature of all others whom she could trust implicitly to help her in this delicate crisis.

"You dear old dog!" she exclaimed, as she lifted the delighted animal on to her lap, and gave him a downright hug; "you were the first to get me into all this trouble,

and now you shall be the one to help me out of it." And the dog, his tail wagging vigorously, out of gratitude for the unexpected caress, looked at her with his great, honest eyes, and barked out his answer as plainly as he could, "So I will, Mistress ; so I will."

Edith seated herself at the table, drew her writing-case towards her, and almost without pausing to think, dashed off a short and hasty note. She read it through once, twice ; then threw it on one side and began another. This time her ideas did not seem to flow so easily. When she had reached the end of the first page, she tore the sheet of paper into fragments, and tossed them on to the fire. A third effort seemed to please her even less. After she had written only a few words her pen rested idly in her hands, and her brow became contracted with a look of painful thought. Presently she took up the first letter she had written, and looked over it again. After all, first thoughts were best. The words in this one

had come from her heart ; and if not very carefully chosen, at least they were honest and sincere.

This was what she had said :

“ DEAR CAPTAIN NEVILLE,

“ When we met last autumn on the Rhine, you never recognised me as Edith Vivian, your father’s ward ; but I knew you almost from the first, to be the Cousin Harry whom I had not seen for twelve years, not since we played together once as children at Enderleigh. I have learnt to see how wrong and deceitful it was of me to allow you to remain in ignorance of our relationship ; and the silence which at first seemed but a harmless jest has since caused me many a pang of self-reproach. Will you try to forgive me, and to let the past be forgotten between us, as though it had never been ? I have but little time to make this brief and tardy confession, for until within the last few minutes I was quite unprepared to meet you here. I send this

note by an old friend of yours;—one who is not apt to forget those who have been kind to him, any more than is his mistress,

“Your cousin,

“EDITH VIVIAN.”

“Oh, Inconsistency, thy name is woman!” In one line she begged that the past might be forgotten, and in the next she declared herself incapable of forgetting!

This letter with all its faults was, however, the one which Miss Vivian decided to send. She folded and addressed it more carefully than it had been written, sealed it with the crest of the Vivians, and then called Rupert to her. Lifting the dog again on to her lap, she twisted the note securely within his collar: for a moment she had thought of putting it in his mouth, but fortunately remembered that if she had done so, no hand but her own would have been safe in trying to take it out again. Then she knelt down beside him, looked straight into his “*dear old eyes*” and bade

him do his errand well. Who could do it better? she thought. Who so good a messenger to the man she had injured, as the dog whose life he had saved?

Little Fanny might certainly have the character of being troublesome and often in the way when she was *not* wanted, but to-day it seemed her fortune to be in the way just when she *was* wanted; for Edith had but just risen from her knees when the door was thrown open with somewhat scant ceremony, and Miss Price once more made her appearance. “I told you I’d come back, Aunt Edith,” she said, patronizingly; “I’ve quite done my tea, and now I want to see you dress.”

“So you shall, dear,” replied her so-called aunt, kindly; for she felt really grateful, just then, to the little girl, who, to tell the truth, sometimes teased her pretty considerably. “But first I want you to take Prince Rupert to say, ‘How dye do’ to Uncle Harry, who hasn’t seen him for a long time. Run along the passage, knock

at his door and then open it, and say, 'Uncle Harry, Aunt Edith says, "Here's an old friend come to see you."'" And then, Fanny, mind you don't go in, but come back to me directly, because, you know, Uncle Harry said he had letters to write before dinner, and did not want you."

If Miss Vivian had chosen to look at the matter fairly, I think she would have seen that his present visitor and the contents of her note were much more likely to unfit her cousin's mind for letter-writing, than even the company of his little niece.

With her heart beating very fast, she saw the little girl depart willingly on her errand, followed by her dog. Listening at the open door she heard the two little creatures run along the passage; she heard the knock at Harry Neville's door, and then she heard the childish voice repeat word for word the message she had given. Then the door was quickly closed again, and Edith knew that the die was cast.

How she dressed herself for dinner that

day, she never quite knew. She rang for her maid, and made her hasty toilette, helped by Susan and hindered by Fanny, feeling all the time as if she were in a dream; picturing to herself at one moment her cousin's astonishment, perhaps, his anger, at the reception of her letter, torturing herself in the next with the fear lest that letter might have fallen into wrong hands. More than once she felt as if she would have recalled it if she could, and trusted all to chance.

She had made one resolution, however, and that was, to be in the drawing-room in good time; and so she was dressed and preparing to leave her room even before the second bell, which rang half an hour before dinner, had finished pealing forth its warning summons. As she did so, a door at the further end of the passage was opened, and the pattering of little feet was heard in the corridor. The next moment, with eyes flashing, and every muscle in his body quivering with delight, her dog jumped

upon her, to the no small detriment of her delicate muslins.

She stooped down and felt his collar.
The letter was gone.

CHAPTER IX.

IF Miss Vivian, when she went downstairs some twenty minutes before the dinner-hour, had any hope of seeing her cousin alone, and thus being spared the awkwardness of a meeting before others of the family, she was destined to be disappointed; for when she entered the drawing-room she found it already tenanted by her uncle, who was dressed for dinner, and had evidently no intention of leaving the room again till that time should arrive. He looked up with a pleased smile as she opened the door, and beckoned to her, to come and sit beside him on his sofa. “Come here, my dear, I haven’t seen you for such a long time, and I want to hear all

about your travels last year, and how old Fan got on in the land of frogs. If she came out in some of her yellow caps, she must have astonished the natives, I should think."

"I declare, Uncle Edward, you are as bad as Kate Wentworth," said Edith, laughing; "but you must know we never went into France at all."

Either there was something in the evident pleasure he felt at seeing her, or else something in the thought of how near he had been to the very gates of death, which made her heart soften towards the old man as it had never done before; and with less of reluctance than, a year ago, she could have believed possible, she gently laid her hand on his, which was resting on his knee. The long fingers—so thin and white from his recent illness—closed on hers with a warm clasp; and even in that momentary gesture she could not help thinking how like Sir Edward was, in every trick of his manner, to his son Harry. She knew that

this man was thirsting, and had been thirsting for years, for her money to build up the failing fortunes of his house. She knew that he would have made little of sacrificing her, body and soul, at the shrine of his covetousness; but it was something to know, also, that personally he had a kindly feeling towards her, and that her very strength of will and independence of spirit made the prize he was angling for, seem all the more worth winning in his eyes. So she sat on beside him, and submitted with a good grace to his cross-questionings, as to her travels and adventures of the preceding autumn, wondering all the while about the fate of her letter, and as to how her cousin would think fit to greet her when he did make his appearance. I am not sure whether Captain Neville was pleased or not to find them so sitting when he came in. If anything, I think it was a shade of annoyance that passed over his face. He was late; almost the last of the party to arrive, but Edith's letter had done its work.

He had learnt his lesson, and behaved very well under the circumstances,—very well indeed for a man who was so straightforward by instinct and habit, as to be no good hand at playing any part except a natural one. But for the one involuntary glance of intelligence which passed between them as he entered the room, not even the closest observer would have detected that Edith Vivian and her cousin had ever met before. Even Miss Fanny Price — who seldom allowed anything to escape her notice—would have been at fault here. Captain Neville lounged into the room, and was proceeding leisurely to survey the party assembled there; but the Baronet's keen eyes had no sooner rested on his son than he exclaimed, almost with impatience,—

“Come here, Master Harry, you scapegrace, and shake hands with your cousin Edith. You ought to have known each other long ago.”

And so these two met again; and shook

hands together like good children, as they had been told to do, and Harry murmured something proper about the pleasure he felt at seeing Miss Vivian, etc. But the murmur was not very intelligible, and the hand-shaking was altogether a different affair from what it had been that last time their hands had met, just before they parted on board the little Rhine steamer.

Edith's heart sank within her, for in the very coldness of his touch, she read her own sentence of condemnation. And to her conscience, wrought up as it was just then to a high state of sensitiveness, it seemed as if she had fallen for ever in his esteem. And yet what else would she have had? What else had her letter been written for, but to avoid the annoyance of 'a scene,' and in order that they might meet as they were meeting now?

Her uncle's voice recalled her wandering thoughts.

"What do you think, Hal? It seems, from what Edith has been telling me, that

she must have been on the Rhine last year much about the same time as you were. It is odd that you should never have met."

"Perhaps we did meet, Sir," was Captain Neville's cool reply. "I seem to have a distinct recollection of having seen Miss Vivian's face before."

Poor Edith ! her cheeks grew hot and red as she listened to her cousin's provoking words. This was the way he was going to punish her for her deceit then, was it ? By cruel allusions to the past,—by holding the fear of disclosure for ever suspended like an avenging sword above her head,—by leading her, as it were, to the very brink of a precipice, and then keeping her from falling over, only by a single thread. But no one had time to notice her discomposure, for at this moment the dinner was announced.

Sir Edward made a feeble effort to rise from his sofa without assistance ; but it was of no use, he fell back again quite helplessly.

"You see, my dear, I can't play the part of host any longer. Here Harry, my boy,

give your arm to your cousin, and Tom Price there will take care of me for once."

But Captain Neville hesitated.

"Miss Vivian will excuse me, I am sure, father, if I ask her to go in to dinner with Price to-day. Tom is the best fellow in the world, but he is hardly up to helping you yet as well as I can."

It was quite right that it should be so; that the old should be preferred before the young, the sick before the healthful; only, for the life of her, Edith could not help feeling herself a little 'snubbed' as she took Mr. Price's offered arm in silence.

They were great friends, these two. Tom Price, with his wife and children, had been staying at Haughton since before Christmas. He had plenty of news to tell Edith; and in chatting merrily with him, her slight feeling of annoyance had passed away almost before she reached the dining-room. But even had it been otherwise, it could not have outlived the sight which met her eyes directly after, of her cousin Harry ten-

derly supporting his father as they entered the room, the older man leaning heavily on the strong arm of his son, while he dragged his almost helpless limbs after him ; and the younger one measuring his steps carefully to suit those of the invalid, and looking so perfectly free from self-consciousness all the time.

Edith would not have missed seeing that sight for the world ; only she would have given a good deal, now, to have resisted the girlish impulse which had prompted her to write that foolish, worse than foolish letter. Her explanation had been so utterly uncalled for, it seemed. How conceited she had been, to think that this man would feel any particular excitement at meeting her again. Her pride rebelled at the thought of how she had lowered herself in the eyes of one who had evidently forgotten her ; or, if he remembered her at all, remembered her only as a travelling acquaintance whose society had helped him to pass a few days pleasantly nearly half a year ago.

So she went on tormenting herself all through the dinner-time, and not, perhaps, without some slight reason, as the reader may acknowledge. Certainly, in the matter of escorting her to the dining-room, Captain Neville had appeared a little uncourteous, even if he had not meant to be so. He might have taken her there, and then returned to fetch his father, if he had only thought of it; but he did not think of it, and so he did not do it.

But had he forgotten her? Not in the very least. Her little Rhine sketch, rescued from its watery grave, now framed and glazed, and prized so highly, as Fanny Price had asserted, might have reassured her on this point, if she had given herself time to recollect that little circumstance. He had told her at parting that he should never forget her, nor the hours he had spent in her company; and Harry Neville was not a man to speak lightly, words that he did not mean. No! he had not in the least forgotten her, and his indifferent manner was but a cloak put

on to hide his deeper feelings. But he was still smarting under the sense of injury which Edith's letter had created in his mind. The intelligence it contained had startled, and almost stunned him at first. There was no doubt about it, he had been cruelly and unjustifiably deceived. He had been led on, in unconscious innocence, to lay bare his innermost thoughts and prejudices to the very last person whom he would have taken into his confidence, had he known who she really was. Moreover, he was bitterly disappointed. From the first moment he had seen Edith Vivian, he had looked up to her, and reverenced her as one of the most perfect of her sex ; a peerless being, whose every thought and action was dictated by high and noble motives ; one who would scorn the least approach to falsehood, as something foreign and repulsive to her nature. Ever since those Rhine days, he had treasured up in his heart and memory, the image of her beauty and of her goodness. He had made an idol of her, in fact, and

now the idol was broken down, and he saw that it had been only made of clay. The angel whom he had so worshipped was a mere woman after all; what is more, a woman who had deceived him, and who could therefore be to him as nothing, from henceforth for evermore.

This thought, more than any other, perhaps, tended to restore his equanimity; and by the time he had dressed for dinner, he had quite recovered his outward self-possession of manner, though the soreness of feeling which the blow had inflicted still remained. Doubtless, it was a wise resolution he had arrived at, to put her away from his thoughts and heart for good and all; one, which, in his present self-confident spirit, he thought it easy enough to carry out. Take care, Master Harry! Pride goes before a fall! Angel or woman? Which is the more dangerous to a man's peace of mind, I wonder?

At dinner-time Edith was placed between Sir Edward Neville and his son-in-law, Mr.

Price ; consequently she had but little opportunity of talking to her cousin, who took the bottom of the table. The conversation was tolerably general and animated, turning a good deal on the hunting-field, the parish, the chances for and against the present frost lasting much longer, and such other local subjects as are usually discussed at the dinner-table of a country house, when the guests are tolerably well-bred and well-informed. Yet all the while her uncle contrived to press upon Edith a good many questions concerning her last year's trip to Germany, some of which she found a little difficult to answer.

Afterwards, however, when the gentlemen rejoined the ladies in the drawing-room, Miss Vivian was sitting on a sofa, a little apart from the others. Mrs. Price had left her alone there, when she went up to pay her nightly visit to Miss Fanny in bed. Harry Neville's keen eyes took in at a glance all that was going on in the room when he entered ; and no sooner had they

rested on his cousin, than without a moment's hesitation he walked across the room to the place where she was sitting. Edith felt, rather than saw, that he was making his way towards her, for she never once raised her eyes. I will not say but that her heart beat somewhat faster at the thought of what was coming, but she managed to preserve a fair show of outward composure. He for his part seemed quite at his ease and completely master of the situation. You see the cards had been shuffled since those old days on the Rhine, and he had the game in his own hands now.

“So you are my cousin Edith, after all?” was his cool remark, as he took possession of the place she made for him on the sofa beside her.

“So it seems,” she answered, in a tone of studied indifference, which equalled, if it did not exceed his own. As she spoke she closed and clasped a book of photographs which she had been looking at before he came in, and quietly laid it aside. This she

did, partly because she was not one of those women who always seem to think it necessary to have something in their fingers to play with, when they are talking to a gentleman ; and partly because she did not care that her cousin should notice how her hands *would* tremble, in spite of all her efforts to keep them still. Then she clasped those same hands tightly together, and waited for the next words he might choose to say.

Those words did not seem to be forthcoming very readily. He was a little taken back at the apparent coolness of her demeanour. From her letter, he had certainly been prepared to expect more of humility and even of penitence in her manner ; and then perhaps, he would have been very merciful. But as she had chosen to take this tone with him, he was determined that she should not go altogether unpunished. Turning it over in his mind, he soon came to the conclusion that to one of her disposition commonplace flattery would be the most ingenious kind of torture he could inflict.

“How I wish I had known it sooner,” he said, with a bow and a smile which nearly drove her mad. “It is too bad that I should have been so many days in the company of such a charming cousin, without being in the least being aware of the fact.”

His words had the effect he intended, and Edith’s cheek began to burn.

“How cruel you are to me!” she exclaimed, in a very different tone from that in which she had spoken before. “You might have known that I have suffered dearly enough for the deceit I used towards you, without punishing me by such an unmeaning compliment as that. You cannot be more angry with me than I am with myself. And yet,”—her voice was trembling now,—“and yet I think you will forgive me if I ask you, cousin Harry?”

As she spoke the last words almost in a whisper, she raised her glorious eyes to his, with a look which might have turned the head of many an older and wiser man than he was.

The words, “By Jove, that I will,” were on Harry Neville’s lips, but they were never spoken. He had resolved for the time being to eschew sentiment, and to steel his heart against the voice of the charmer, charm she never so wisely. That he felt the power of that look I do not doubt, it was not in his man’s nature not to feel it, but outwardly he made no sign, and only relapsed into his former indifference of manner.

“I don’t know, I’m sure, about forgiving, cousin Edith,” he said, with a little hard laugh, and the slightest possible stress upon the word cousin; “there’s not very much to forgive I fancy. I suppose you couldn’t help it.”

This was not far from the truth, and yet it was a little provoking to Edith to have her piece of pretty penitence received in such a very matter-of-fact sort of way, to find that he could dismiss with a few light words the subject she had been thinking so all-important. And once again the same feeling of

annoyance she had felt before dinner, began to torment her now. What a fuss she had been making about nothing, to be sure. To think that she should have fretted and worried herself for months past, and spent so many sleepless nights, lamenting over a fault which he seemed to treat but as a mere error of judgment after all,—scarcely worth the trouble of discussing. And then again, that stupid letter. What *could* have possessed her to write it?

“ Suppose we agree to a truce,” were Harry Neville’s next words ; “ to let by-gones be bygones, and to start fair from to-night, just as if we had never met before. That is what you wish, is it not ? ”

He spoke in a more natural tone than he had used till then ; for he had seen the cloud upon her brow, and had no wish to push his triumph too far.

Edith answered “ yes ” mechanically, and felt herself to be an arrant hypocrite as she said it.

He gave one quick glance round the room

to see that they were not watched, and then, leaning over her, added in a lower tone, “It’s a bargain then. Shall we shake hands upon it?”

She could only just do as he told her. She was in his power it seemed, and there was nothing for it but to obey his wishes. So she put her cold hand into his without saying a word, and he gave it a friendly cousinly shake, and having thus made it up (a little generously as he thought), he began to talk more lightly of other subjects.

Still the conversation languished strangely. They did not seem to get on together half so well as they had done in the garden at Bonn, or on the Kreutzberg, or even on the little balcony at Königswinter.

Possibly it was the very remembrance of that stormy night at Königswinter, and the unsought confidence which he had forced upon Edith then, which prevented anything like confidence between them now; besides, they were *both* playing a part to-night, only with this difference. She was simply trying

to deceive him with respect to her real feelings, he was deceiving her and himself as well. He *thought* that he could forget, that he had but to will it so, and the past, with all its haunting memories and associations could be blotted out, as though it had never been. But she was past thinking this now. She had learnt by experience that it is not so easy to school one's feelings, and to keep them in the safe grooves in which they ought to run. She knew that when she had said "yes" just now, in answer to his question about letting bygones be bygones, she had spoken the next thing to a falsehood. She did not and she could not forget one single incident of the past, nor did she really wish to do so. She knew all this too well, but she had no mind that he should know it; and so to prevent such knowledge, she roused herself to 'make conversation' on the first commonplace subject which suggested itself. But *made* conversation is seldom either very original or interesting—and in this case it was not a great success.

One little crumb of comfort was, however, unexpectedly vouchsafed to our heroine during their somewhat dreary discourse. Just once, for a moment, Captain Neville forgot himself and the part he was playing. Just for one minute the mask he chose to wear was lifted, and his true self peeped out from beneath it.

All of a sudden, in the midst of some totally irrelevant subject, he exclaimed, “*A propos* of nothing, Rupert was *so* glad to see me this afternoon, he had not forgotten me in the least. I thought he was going to devour me at first out of pure affection. What a good old dog it is!”

And as he said it, there was the same old look in his eyes that she had learnt to know so well in times past. It brought a happier smile to her lips than had been there the whole night; but before she could say a word in answer he had turned the conversation again, and was asking after the Wentworths, “and that pretty little daughter of theirs. Kate, I think her name was.

how is she? She is a great friend of yours, is she not? What a nice amiable girl she was, and so devoted to her mother."

Edith was somewhat surprised at this close questioning, she did not remember that he had taken so much interest in Miss Wentworth when in her company; in fact, he had taken but very little notice of her at all. At first she was pleased to hear him speak in such terms of her favourite Kate, but when he went on for some time longer in the same strain, she grew a little weary of the subject. When the ear has grown accustomed to the delicate incense of implied admiration from 'the lips that we love,' the praises of even one's dearest friend are apt to fall somewhat flat by comparison. Take him for all in all, her companion did not seem nearly so entertaining to-night, as she had found him in those old days on the Rhine. Indeed, this cool, almost impertinent cousin sitting by her now, was altogether a different person from the courteous well-bred Captain Neville, of six months before.

She grew captious and ill at ease. Indeed, the superb Miss Vivian was beginning to feel, perhaps for the first time in her life, a slight pang of the selfsame jealousy to which more ordinary mortals are often subject.

It might have been for this reason, that she was not sorry when their conversation was interrupted.

A good-looking young man, who had only joined the party after they had sat down to dinner, and had therefore failed in obtaining a formal introduction to Miss Vivian, came behind Harry Neville, and laid his hand on his shoulder.

“I hope you are not going to monopolize your cousin all the evening, Neville?” he said; “your sister Mary tells me that Miss Vivian sings divinely. Won’t you ask her if she will sing to us?”

“Ask her yourself, my fine fellow,” exclaimed Harry, pulling him forward. “O, you have not been introduced, haven’t you?” he added, in reply to some inaudible answer on

the other's part, "I'll soon remedy that omission. Miss Vivian, allow me to introduce to you, Sir Ralph Armytage, of Oakley Grange, formerly Cornet in Her Majesty's 25th Dragoon Guards, now lord of the manor, and the boldest cross-country rider in the county. Also squire of dames, and a devoted admirer of the muses and graces into the bargain."

The poor young baronet (for he was very young) blushed ruby red under the infliction of Captain Neville's unmerciful banter, but Edith good-naturedly came to the rescue, and thereby made him her slave from that day forth.

"In which last respect I for one am bound to say I think Sir Ralph shows his excellent taste," she said; "I will sing for you with pleasure, if you really wish it," she added. "Indeed, I ought to have offered to do so sooner, perhaps, to amuse my uncle, he is so fond of music."

Rising, she took the young man's arm, which was offered in a flutter of gratified

pride and delight, for he was fairly *épris* with the frankness, which was one of the greatest charms of Edith's manner.

“Oh, I see Uncle Edward has gone to bed,” she said, as she glanced towards her uncle's sofa, and saw that it was empty; and it was not without a feeling of annoyance, that she surmised that his farewells to her had been purposely omitted, in order to avoid interrupting her *tête-à-tête* with her cousin.

“Yes, my father is obliged to go to bed early now, since his illness,” said Harry; “he will be sorry to have missed your music, I know. If you will give me five minutes' grace, Miss Vivian, I will go and see that he is all right for the night, and be back again almost before you have finished your first symphony.”

Sir Ralph Armytage led Edith in triumph to the pianoforte, and proceeded to overhaul a very untidy portfolio of Mary Neville's, in search of some of his favourite songs. He was a cheery young fellow, not yet twenty-one, but who had had the run

of the house ever since he was a child, and did pretty much as he liked with all its inmates. When the Nevilles had first known him he had been only the poor son of an officer's widow, but now, in consequence of the unexpected death of two cousins, he had inherited the title and estates of his uncle, Sir Florance Armytage, of Oakley Grange, one of the richest and most important landowners of the county. The old man had died less than six months ago, so young Sir Ralph had hardly as yet grown accustomed to his new honours.

He was passionately fond of music, and no mean performer himself, in which respect he differed from Captain Neville, who, though he could whistle an air through perfectly from beginning to end, and knew almost every waltz that ever was written, could scarcely have kept a second I should say, if it had been to save his life.

The latter, when he returned to the room, seated himself at a safe distance, and watched his cousin in silence. His mood

was fast softening towards her, as he sat there enjoying the sight of her beauty and listening to her really fine singing. And then his sister Mary, who never could leave well alone, came and sat beside him.

“I am so glad you seem to get on so well with Edith,” she began in a low tone, as she wound her arm into his. “Is she not a glorious creature, Harry? Tell me what you think.”

And Harry, thus adjured, instantly relapsed into one of his provoking humours.

“What do I think, Minnie?” he exclaimed; “why that the piano or something is out of tune to-night, and that you’re an old goose! A dear fat old goose,” he continued, pulling her towards him, and giving her a kiss; “a goose that’s stuffed full of nonsense, and going to be done brown before long. That’s what I think!”

The kiss mollified her a good deal, or even good-natured Minnie Neville might have been offended at his personalities.

“You are very disagreeable, Harry,” she

retorted, trying to look cross, “and very rude, too, as it seems to me. I wish you wouldn’t be so lazy, but would go and turn over the leaves for Edith, instead of lying here doing nothing. I am sure she has a right to expect a little more attention, particularly as poor papa has been obliged to go to bed.”

“Well, you see, Minnie,” he answered, leisurely, and yawning a little, “for one thing I shouldn’t do it half so well as Master Ralph there does, and besides it would be such a pity to spoil sport. See what a pretty picture they make together. There now, don’t go and interfere,” he added, pulling her back on to the sofa as she tried to get up.

“You are talking great rubbish, Harry, to-night, I think,” replied Minnie, who was now getting fairly provoked. It must have been on her brother’s account ; for, considering she was nearly old enough to be Sir Ralph’s mother, she could scarcely have been jealous about him :—but there !

she was a woman ; and so there is no knowing.

“I shall go and thank my cousin for her songs, if you do not,” continued Miss Neville, a little grandly. She struggled to free herself from Harry’s encircling arm. He let her go when he found that she was in earnest, but he himself remained sitting where he was.

Before Sir Ralph Armytage left the Manor House that night, he had asked and received permission to ride over and practise some duets with Miss Vivian the following morning ; and had also obtained her promise to ride a favourite bay mare of his, to see the hounds throw-off, the first day they were announced to meet in the neighbourhood, after the frost was gone.

“I congratulate you upon your conquest, Miss Vivian,” said Harry Neville to his cousin, as he wished her good night ; and the words were accompanied by a smile which was not altogether pleasing. “Sir Ralph Armytage is about the best match to be found in this part of England.”

“I think you had better reserve your congratulations till the conquest is achieved, Captain Neville,” replied Edith, trying to speak lightly, but with a sad curl on her proud lip.

“And *I* think you have no need to call each other by such grand names; and that you, Harry, had better leave off talking such utter nonsense,” exclaimed his sister Minnie, still a little crossly. “Edith knows as well as you do, that Ralph is a mere boy.”

“Not such a boy,” retorted Harry, “but that he has fancied himself in love a score of times already, and will go on doing so till the end of the chapter, which, being interpreted, means, till he is fairly settled down and married. Master Ralph will be one-and-twenty years of age next month, and will then come in to nearly twice as many thousands a-year. Besides, real live baronets are never looked upon as boys, are they?” he asked of Edith. But before she could reply, Mary again broke in. “Come,

Edith, dear, you and I had better go to bed. When Harry gets into one of these humours it is of no use '*argufying*' with him, as Fanny Price would say, and you must be tired, I am sure, after your long journey."

"Was it a cross old goose? and did it want to keep its bit of a baronet all to itself?" were the last words whispered into Mary Neville's ear, as she was held back forcibly in her brother's arms when just about to follow Edith out of the room. Words, one would have thought, not exactly calculated to improve her temper; but, strange to relate, they had quite the contrary effect to what might have been expected. The near neighbourhood of the laughing face she loved so well was irresistible. In an instant her arms were clinging so tightly round her brother's neck that they almost strangled him; and she began kissing him till he cried for mercy. "Who was the goose now?" she asked, by way of a finish?

It was quite impossible for Minnie Neville to be out of temper for many minutes together, and equally impossible for anyone to help loving her.

* * * * *

Our heroine kept late vigils that night. It was not very surprising, perhaps, that she did not sleep soon or soundly. Excitement keeps people wakeful; and the past day had been an eventful one. But it was certainly strange that she should have found anything to cry about.

Everybody had been very kind to her, she had been petted and made much of by her uncle, the meeting with her cousin had gone off far better than she had any right to expect; and yet, when at last she did fall into an uneasy slumber, just as the cold grey light of the winter's day that was about to dawn came stealing into her room, it is a certain fact, that Edith Vivian's eyes were red and swollen, and her pillow was wet with tears.

CHAPTER X.

THE frost lasted for six days longer; yet on each of those six days Sir Ralph Armytage, with an ingenuity worthy of a better cause, managed to frame good and sufficient excuses for riding or driving over to Haughton Manor. Now it was a message from his mother to Mary Neville; now a book he wanted to borrow from the Captain. More often it was some new song or duet for Miss Vivian to try with him.

In those days the Oakley Grange hot-houses were despoiled of their choicest produce for the benefit of the dwellers at the Manor House. The fruit and flowers were ostensibly presented to Sir Edward or Miss Neville, but there were generally to be

found amongst the latter some one or two rare specimens of exotics, carefully packed in the softest wool, and purposely intended for Miss Vivian to copy or to wear. Once or twice Harry Neville pressed Sir Ralph to stay to dinner, or rather asked him to do so, for on each occasion the invitation was accepted without any show of reluctance. The Grange was a good five miles distant, but the young fellow made nothing of the dark, lonely ride home on those moonless nights, and did not seem to care in the least for the bitter cold or even the driving snow. Why should he? In his heart there had sprung up a warm glow of hope and happiness, on which all the outward influences in the world could not have had the slightest possible effect. It was as Harry had prophesied on that first night. The young baronet had fallen—or believed himself to have fallen, which comes to much the same thing—desperately in love with Sir Edward Neville's beautiful guest. He was fairly infatuated ; not taking the

slightest pains to conceal his admiration, nor caring, in the least, who might notice or remark upon it. His eyes followed Edith's every movement, and his ears were open to catch every chance word that fell from her lips. Many were the perilous excursions on land or on ice, into which, during those frosty days, he persuaded the younger members of the party to venture, for the mere pleasure, I believe, of sometimes touching Edith's hand, or in the more ambitious hope, perhaps, of saving her from falling, in the event of her making a false step.

Poor Mary Neville looked on at these proceedings with despairing eyes. Here was an enemy in the very camp; an intruder she had never dreamt of, come to interfere with and to mar all her little pet schemes, over which she had plotted in secret for years, just when there seemed a fair chance of bringing them to a successful issue. And the worst was, she was so utterly powerless to hinder what was going

on. No one would help her either. Her father was generally out driving at the time that Sir Ralph selected to pay his visits, and it was hard to make him believe what he did not see with his own eyes. Her sister Laura, Mrs. Price, whom she took partly into her confidence one day, only laughed at her troubles, and told her she had lived long enough to learn that no good came of meddling and match-making. As to Harry, he was the worst of all. She could not think what had come over her dear soldier-brother : she had never known him so disagreeable or impracticable in all his life. He who had ever seemed so ready to give up his own wishes for the sake of others, had suddenly grown quite selfish. He would spend whole hours idly lounging on a sofa, poring over the pages of some stupid novel ; or at other times would tease her almost beyond endurance, by giving vent to sneering and cynical observations about men and things, which she knew to be altogether opposed to his real

opinions. And yet he was never out of temper, and never actually rude to any of the assembled company.

Two or three times, when she would have had him join the walking party, or escort his cousin to see some one of the lions of the neighbourhood, she found, to her extreme astonishment, that he had volunteered to drive with his father in Edith's chariot, a mode of progression he had always held in old times in dire and utter abomination. He had always been wont to call their own old-fashioned close carriage the “funeral coach,” and to declare that the people who drove therein became like unto “the baked meats.” Sir Edward had not the self-denial to relinquish of his own accord the pleasure of his son's society ; but one day, when Mary remonstrated with her brother on his thus leaving their guest so often to her own resources, he gave up the point at once, only he contrived cleverly that she should take his place instead, which was by no means what she wanted, as she was thus prevented from

keeping her usual sharp watch on Master Ralph's proceedings. As it happened, just as the carriage was turning out of the Park gates, she had the pleasure of seeing that young gentleman tenderly assisting her cousin Edith over a very slippery piece of the high-road, Mrs. Price and Fanny keeping at a discreet distance behind, while that bad boy Harry, with his own large greyhound and Prince Rupert both careering at his heels, was striding rapidly away across the fields, in quite a different direction. They all looked up and nodded gaily at her as she passed. Nevertheless, Minnie Neville did not particularly enjoy her drive that day.

And Miss Vivian herself, what was she doing and thinking all this time? I am sorry to have to write it of my peerless Edith, but she was behaving very badly. For the first time in her life she lowered herself in her own eyes, and in the eyes of all who loved her best, by flirting outrageously with the young baronet. In after years she never could look back upon those

few days without feelings of the deepest shame and sorrow. True, she only did what many another girl has done, and is doing every day, without a pang of remorse or compunction (so much the more shame for them); but that Edith Vivian, with her fastidious sense of honour and truthfulness, could reconcile it to her own conscience to go on encouraging a man whom she *knew* she did not love in the least, is a mystery I cannot pretend to solve. For when I said, at the beginning of this chapter, that Sir Ralph's ingenuity was worthy of a better cause, I said it advisedly. His case was hopeless from the first. He was a mere boy compared to Edith, in spite of his one-and-twenty years; he was her inferior, too, in intellect and education, although a cheery and pleasant companion enough in a country house on wet days. I will not say but that Edith did as much as this: she *asked* herself the question, whether she could love him or not? She was thrown much upon his society for amusement, for her cousin

Harry in these days seemed to take but little notice of her one way or the other, beyond playing his part of host with a fair amount of courtesy. Sir Ralph was young, rich, handsome, and a baronet—the best match in the county, as Captain Neville had called him; and it is not in a woman's nature to be altogether insensible to such attractions. It is just possible that had she met him a year before, and he had played his cards well, the poor young fellow might have had a chance; but as it was, Edith's heart never beat one whit the quicker at the sound of his approaching footstep, the colour on her cheek never grew one shade deeper beneath the glance of his admiring eyes; and yet she encouraged him shamefully,—she would wear his flowers in her hair, and was ready to sing for him or with him whenever it pleased him to ask her.

It must not be supposed that she misunderstood the meaning of his attentions. Few women do, I am almost tempted to say, no woman *can* misunderstand such attentions,

whatever she may choose to say. Perhaps she did not quite believe he was in earnest, and then he was so *very* amusing. At any rate, it was very pleasant to be sought after and made so much of; it was easier to acquiesce than to resist, to go with the stream than against it; she could stop all in good time she thought. So, yielding to that self-indulgent delusive feeling of restfulness and security, she suffered herself to be borne along by the rolling current, till all of a sudden she found herself lying, stunned and bruised and bleeding, on the sunken rock towards which she had been drifting all the time, far, far away from the “haven where she would fain have been.”

On a certain Wednesday, about a week after Miss Vivian’s arrival in that part of the country, the little world of Haughton woke up to find that the frost had given way at last; a sudden thaw had set in, and the piled-up snow which had lain for nearly a fortnight in the lanes and fields, and which had been so white and dazzling

only the day before was rapidly being reduced into isolated heaps of dirty greasy conglomerate. Before noon a perfect deluge of rain began to fall, which materially assisted the melting process that was going on all over the place. The wind, too, was blowing hard from the south-west, and sometimes drove the rain before it in such fierce gusts as made progress almost an impossibility.

It was a day on which anyone but a lover, or perhaps a philanthropist, would have thought it sheer madness to leave the safe shelter of the fireside. And Snaffle, the stud groom at Oakley, did, I believe, think his master slightly demented when, after lunch, he heard him give the order “to bring the dog-cart round, and look sharp about it.”

He expressed himself somewhat to that effect that same evening in the housekeeper’s room, whither he made his way to get a drop of something warm and comfortable after his dreary ride home.

“It is my belief master’s going clean out of his senses,” he remarked to his particular friend the still-room maid. “Courtin’ may be all very well in its way, and I’m not the man to say it ain’t; but you see, me and the cob wasn’t engaged in any such diversions at the time, and so we’d nothing to keep our spirits up with. Bless’d if I didn’t think we should all three have been drownded or blowed into the middle of next week afore we got half-way down the avenue.”

Edith Vivian herself was half-inclined to share Mr. Snaffle’s opinion with regard to Sir Ralph’s sanity, when she heard the wheels of his dog-cart scraping along the carriage-drive, and little Fanny, who was as usual staring out of window, announced with a shout of delight who it was that had come.

“Shades of my ancestors! what shall we have next?” exclaimed Harry Neville, starting up from the sofa, where he had been lying for some time apparently ab-

sorbed in the pages of a certain book called 'Vanity Fair.' He walked to the window where Fanny was standing, and threw it wide open. "Hallo, young sir!" he called out to the new arrival; "here's charming weather for an aquatic excursion! What in the name of all that's mysterious has brought you over here on such a day as this, 'when none but dogs and Englishmen are seen about the streets'?"

The 'young sir' thus addressed, had already sprung out of the dog-cart, and was busy freeing himself from the panoply of oilskin and waterproof wrappings in which his anxious mother had enveloped him at starting.

"All right," he said, laughing and nodding back at Harry, while, at the same time, he shook the water out of his hair. "Business of importance which brooked no delay. I'll tell you all about it as soon as I can get out of these."

Then he made as though he would have come in to the room through the open win-

dow ; but this, with a little shriek, Mary Neville protested against, and peremptorily desired him to go round by the Hall, and dry himself properly first.

The process did not take very long, yet Harry found time to bestow a meaning look upon his cousin, which she met and returned bravely, although a tell-tale blush (more the result of vexation than of consciousness, perhaps) *would* betray itself on her cheek.

“A cœur vaillant rien d'impossible, eh, Mrs. Price ?” murmured Harry, as he seated himself by his sister Laura’s side, and proceeded forthwith to turn over and entangle very hopelessly, the wools and bobbins contained in her work-basket.

Sir Ralph Armytage came in, looking very radiant and happy, though the rain had made his shirt collar somewhat limp, and had taken the curl out of his hair. He bore all the raillery, which he naturally came in for, very good-temperedly, for one of his tender years ; but his eyes were

sparkling, and he was evidently in a state of restlessness and suppressed excitement. And no wonder; he had kept his trump card in his hand all this time, and was about to play it out now.

He had not been seated for above a minute or two, when he jumped up again; and going up to Miss Neville, gave her a letter, which, by some miraculous means, he had contrived to keep dry. "There, Mary," he said, "my mother sent you that; and as she wants to have an answer to-night, if possible, I thought I had better bring it over myself; that's why I came."

Then, sitting down much nearer to Miss Vivian than he had been before, he told her in a few low words the purport of his mother's letter, while Mary Neville was still in the act of reading it.

The hounds were to meet on the following day, Thursday, at Purley Bottom, about a mile and a half beyond the Grange, and one of the loveliest spots in the whole county. He had only learnt this for

certain the night before ; but Miss Vivian had promised him a week ago, to ride his mare to the meet the first time it was to take place within reach. Might he send Queen Mab over in the morning, for her to ride from Haughton ? or would she prefer to drive to Oakley, and mount there ? His mother had written to ask all the party to lunch at the Grange afterwards, and had sent an express invitation to Miss Vivian by himself. Mrs. Armytage, he said, was most anxious to make her acquaintance. She would come, would she not ?

All this was confided to Edith in a sort of breathless monotone, and then he waited for her reply. The poor young fellow was a little disconcerted, when she broke into a merry laugh.

“ You don’t mean to hold me to my promise, or to expect me to ride to Purley or anywhere else, such weather as this, surely, Sir Ralph, do you ? ” she asked, quite aloud.

“ I mean wind and weather permitting,

of course," he answered, a little nettled at her tone, and still more at the fact of her having laughed at his proposal. "But you need have no fear, it never rains in this part of the world more than twelve hours at a time; and you'll find we shall have as fine a morning to-morrow as anybody could wish to see."

Meanwhile, Miss Neville had read her letter through, and was sitting with a bewildered and rather injured expression of countenance. "I don't know, I'm sure, Ralph, what to say," she began, in a plaintive sort of tone. "I am afraid it will be a little difficult to manage; you see we can't all leave papa, and—"

There is no knowing how many obstacles she might have contrived to find, had not an unexpected ally appeared on the young man's side in the shape of Sir Edward Neville, who roused himself at the word papa. "Who's taking my name in vain?" he asked, throwing down his newspaper, and taking off his spectacles, "and what is

it that is difficult to manage ? Let me hear what it is you're talking about, Minnie."

" It's just this, sir," exclaimed Sir Ralph, starting up, and taking the matter into his own hands before Miss Neville could reply. " The hounds are to throw off to-morrow morning somewhere near Purley Bottom, and my mother has a luncheon party afterwards ; and she has sent me over to ask if all or some of your party will drive or ride to the meet, and stop to lunch at Oakley on your road home. She says she has not seen anything of you for so long."

He did not add—the cunning young schemer!—that the whole plan of the expedition to Purley, and the luncheon afterwards, was the invention of his own fertile brain, or that poor Mrs. Armytage had been nearly driven into a nervous fever at the thought of how she should be able to provide for her party at such short notice and in *such* weather.

" Well, I call that a very pleasant invitation," said Sir Edward, after a moment's

pause; "and I don't see why it shouldn't be accepted. I, for one, should like to go very much."

"But, my dear papa," began Mary Neville, in a tone of eager expostulation, "surely you are not strong enough to bear the excitement; only think!"

"Indeed, Minnie, I believe I am," he exclaimed, a little impatiently. "I long to hear the music of the 'tally-ho!' once more," he added, with a sparkle in his eye which had not been there for many a long day before. "It will make a man of me again. You've all been doing all you can to turn me into an old woman, and it will be hard if, in my present demoralised condition, you and Edith can't keep me in order between you to-morrow."

"Edith is going to ride with Ralph, papa, it seems," said Minnie, demurely, but evidently thinking that this ought to be a conclusive argument against the proposed expedition.

Her father's face grew a little longer, certainly, at this intelligence.

“My dear,” he said, addressing Edith; “have you brought your riding horse with you? if not, I fear we shall hardly be able to mount you here. My stud is rather small at present, for Mary there never rides now, and I sold my hunter after the last season.”

Edith looked up at her uncle as he was speaking, but she left Sir Ralph to answer for her, as he was only too ready to do. “Miss Vivian promised me a long while ago to try my bay mare some day, sir,” he said; “so, perhaps, she will do me the honour to ride her over to Purley to-morrow. I do not think she will tire you in the least,” he added, turning to Edith, “for she has a good mouth, and her paces are simply perfect.”

“Oh, very well!” said Sir Edward, not without a slight tone of annoyance in his voice, “then that’s all settled, I suppose. You will ride, Harry, of course?”

“I am not sure about going at all, father,” replied Captain Neville, looking up

from his sister's worsted work, in which he had pretended to be very much interested during the preceding conversation. "I have some business which may take me into Bristol to-morrow."

"Oh, do go, Hal; never mind Bristol. It will be one of the best meets of the season," exclaimed Sir Ralph. "And if you don't care about riding your own horse, I can mount you also." It was a magnanimous offer on his part, all things considered, but the young baronet was in such high spirits at the promised success of his scheme, that he could afford to be generous.

"You're very good, old fellow," replied Harry, "but if I go at all I shall ride Rob Roy. You see," he added, a little languidly, "I'm used to him; and I don't know how I might feel on the top of some of those playful creatures you keep in your stables. My nerve's not so good as it used to be, and I might come off."

"Pish, nonsense!" interrupted his father, "I should like to see the horse that could

throw you, if you ride half as well as you did when you were a schoolboy. Seriously, Hal, I wish you would go to the meet to-morrow, and follow the hounds, too, if you have a mind. You haven't had a single run this season; and you will get out of practice if you don't keep your powers in exercise."

"That's just it, sir; I expect I am out of practice. I haven't seen a real good fox-hunt for the last six years. I went out pig-sticking with some of our fellows several times in India, but that's quite a different affair, though it's not child's play either. I am afraid the sight of an English five-barred gate might give me palpitations of the heart. Besides, it's more than likely I shall be obliged to go into Bristol."

"Confound Bristol!" exclaimed the Baronet, impatiently; "why the plague must you be wanting to go there just when I want you to hunt? If your business means buying a new neck-tie or a bottle of scent, I daresay I could send your old

nurse or one of the maids to get it for you. I wouldn't have you lose the chance of a good run to-morrow for the world. And if you have any doubt about Rob Roy being up to your weight, I'm certain Travers would lend you my old hunter, if I ask him. He is laid up with the gout, and won't be able to ride himself, and the grey mare would carry you over everything like a bird."

While his father was speaking, Harry Neville had risen and walked to the fireplace, standing there, with his back to the fire, in the point of a triangle as it were; for he was about equally distant from Sir Edward on the left-hand and Miss Vivian on the right; and for a moment he leisurely surveyed first one and then the other, before he answered, with perfect good humour,

"Thank you, father, for the offer both of the nurse and the mare, but I shall not require either. I can't tell about the Bristol business till after the post comes in to-morrow, but at any rate no one else can

do it for me ; and as I said before, if I ride at all I shall stick to my own horse,—that is to say, as long as I can,” he added, with a laugh.

“ Well, well,” replied the Baronet, “ please yourself. Ride a cock-horse or a dromedary, if you like, only don’t be such a fool as to lose a good day’s sport if you can help it. I only wish to my heart I were going with you,” he said, in a lower tone, and with a quiet sigh.

The poor old broken-down man had been worked up to quite a pitch of enthusiasm while this talk had been going on about the things in which he had been wont to take so keen an interest ; and then all in a moment the thought had come back to him that the pleasure which only a year ago he had so highly prized could never be enjoyed by him again. But he had made up his mind to ‘ die game.’ He was not one to make a great moan over his own pains and sorrows. The instinct was strong within him which leads the wounded animal to

hide itself away in the deepest recesses of the forest sooner than ask even a pitying glance from the eye of man ; and so his sigh was a very low one, so low, indeed, that only his son's quick ear detected it.

“ So do I, father, with all my heart ; and so you will, soon, please God,” was Harry’s answer ; and there was not the least shade of affectation in his tone now.

“ No, my boy ; never again, never again,” and the Baronet as he spoke turned his eyes upon Harry, with a look which showed how honestly proud he was of his handsome son.

And he looked a son to be proud of, as he stood there, leaning against the mantelpiece in an attitude of easy unstudied grace ; and yet what a provoking obstinate fellow he was, nevertheless. More than once during the discussion which had been going on, he had sought and met the glance of his cousin Edith’s eyes, and had read in them the answer which I believe he wished to find.

“ To hear with eyes is part of love’s rare wit,”

says wise Shakespeare in one of his sonnets. And if ever eyes spoke plainly, Edith's eyes had asked him to join the riding party on the morrow. Why she did so she could hardly have said herself. Perhaps she was beginning to feel frightened at what she had done. The last unequivocal proof of her power over Sir Ralph, which he had given her that day, had opened her eyes, it may be, to the fact that she had gone too far already ; and she was anxious to make good her retreat while still she could. Possibly she might have grown a little weary of her young admirer's unconcealed devotion, or it might have been a mere nameless feminine caprice, which made her wish for her cousin's society on their proposed excursion. But anyhow she did descend to ask him in the way I have said. He read the wish in her eyes plainly enough ; and yet to the very last, out of pure perversity, I believe, he kept up the little farce about the important business, which existed more than three parts in his own imagination.

There came an interruption, in a childish voice. "Ralph, dear, please say I may come too," said little Fanny, putting a pair of dimpled arms round the young baronet's neck. "I do want to see the peacock so!"

"Well, Miss Flibbity-gibbet," he replied, taking her on his knee, and beginning to spoil her, as every one did. "You must find out whether mamma will let you, and whether there will be room. *I* shall be delighted to see you; and so will the peacock, no doubt."

Meanwhile Harry Neville had strolled again to the window, and began watching the weather. The rain was falling in torrents; faster than ever.

"I shan't ask you to stop to dinner to-day, Master Ralph, out of sheer pity for your man and beast," he said. "If you take my advice you will be off home before it gets dark; but you may come to breakfast to-morrow, if you like, animals and all; that's to say, if it's a fine morning; for if this rain lasts we shall have to fish for a fox instead of hunting him."

Sir Ralph might or might not relish this summary dismissal, but he felt that there was no appeal against it ; and, to make the most of the time still left to him, resumed his interrupted conversation with Edith Vivian. Miss Price did not seem to find this very interesting, neither was it in her nature to sit still for long together. In another minute she wriggled down off Ralph's knee, and ran up to her uncle.

“ Oh, Uncle Harry, you wicked story ! ” she exclaimed, in a make-believe whisper, which was loud enough for every one in the room to hear. “ How could you say you should be frightened at a five-barred gate, when you know you told mamma only the other day that you had made Rob Roy take all the fences and gates on your road to the Farm, and the Bruce Castle moat into the bargain, and I know *that's a teaser*, because I heard Pa say so when he was told.”

Captain Neville, by way of answer, immediately pinioned the small person who had addressed him ; and holding her at

arm's length before him, treated her to a ferocious scowl. "Little girls should be seen and not heard, and should never on any account repeat what they hear people say," he said, in a tone of extreme severity; but I do not think he was altogether displeased at her revelations.

CHAPTER XII.

SIR RALPH ARMYTAGE was a true prophet. The sunshine, pouring in a golden flood into Edith's bedroom, almost as soon as it was light on the following day, awoke her to the consciousness that it was a most lovely morning. The rain had ceased before midnight, but not before it had washed away almost every trace of the melted snow; and the wind, which had lasted some hours longer, had in its turn done much towards remedying the effects of the rain, so that the ground was not nearly so heavy as might have been expected. Of course it was muddy, but not enough so to make riding a 'dirty' impossibility; and though there was a light breeze still blow-

ing, it was not more than was fresh and pleasant. Altogether, the day was perfect ; and if Miss Vivian had been indulging in any hope that perhaps her excursion to Purley with Sir Ralph might, after all, be prevented by the weather, she had to give up the idea at once, for not a fragment of an excuse could be found on that score. But I do not think she really wished to find any such pretext for breaking her engagement. The prospect of a long ride through fine country on such a morning as this was too delightful to be given up for the sake of any unpleasant consequences it might entail, and the slight sense of nervousness, the consciousness that she was about to place herself, with her eyes open, in a position of possible danger, from which it might require all her wit and cleverness to extricate herself, added, I am afraid, only an extra zest to her feeling of enjoyment. In fact, she was about to do what her own conscience told her had better be left undone. A few hours later, and oh ! how

thankful she would have been, had she only listened to that warning voice.

When she went downstairs, she found no one in the breakfast-room but her cousin Harry. The post-bag had just been brought in, and he was opening it with his father's key. Amongst the letters was one for Edith, which he gave her as they shook hands, and two or three for himself. Hers did not take very long to read. It was only a missive from Aunt Fanny, giving her all the Enderleigh news, and telling her the old story, that the house was miserable without her, and she must make as much haste home as she could. "Kate had been over to see her once, but her mother was so much worse that she was not able to go out often; and Ernest Vivian, who was staying at the Lyles for a month, had happened to ride over to Enderleigh the same day, and met her there. They seemed quite glad to see each other again," Aunt Fanny thought. This was about all; but the little home details were always interesting to Edith, and she read

the letter twice through, before she folded and replaced it in its envelope. As she did so she noticed that her cousin was similarly engaged. The remembrance of what he had said yesterday about the post flashed upon her, and almost without giving herself time to think, she said,

“ Will you have to go to Bristol to-day ? ”

“ No ! I don’t see that there will be any necessity for it,” he answered in his usual careless way.

“ Then you will be able to ride with us ? ” she asked again, a little eagerly. She was angry with herself the moment afterwards for having shown even so slight a degree of anxiety on the subject, and still more angry when she noted the effect her words appeared to produce upon him. She did not know how much real pleasure her implied invitation had given him, and judging only by the dancing light in his eyes, and the bantering tone in which he answered, she thought he was making fun of her.

“ Certainly, my fair cousin, if *you* wish it.

But I thought three persons were never considered good company."

What possessed him to speak thus he himself, perhaps, would have been puzzled to say, except it might have been as a cloak to hide a deeper feeling. Edith's words had been spoken in perfect good faith, and should have been met in the same spirit. One half-word, or even look of encouragement, and she might have been tempted to let him see that she felt all her own weakness and looked to him for help; but as it was, his speech, and especially the stress he had laid upon *her* wishes, had simply provoked her, and she turned away with an angry flush rising to her cheek and brow.

"Pray please yourself in the matter, and don't let me interfere with your plans in any way," she said, trying to speak haughtily, but with a dangerous trembling in her voice. "I have not the slightest doubt Sir Ralph will take excellent care of me."

"I am not so sure of that," he answered laughing. (He could afford to keep his temper,

for her previous words had convinced him that she really wished him to go with her, in spite of her assumed indifference.) “Sir Ralph’s horses are most of them skittish young creatures; and if he rides his black hunter to-day, as I suppose he will, you will find him a half-broken, ill-tempered brute, very good at going across country, but not exactly an eligible companion to go alongside a lady’s horse. However you are a good horsewoman I suppose, indeed I know you are, and so you will be able to look out for yourself.”

Edith had no time to make any reply, for at that moment Mrs. Price and Mary Neville came into the room, and Harry rang the bell for prayers. Family prayer was rather a new institution at Haughton Manor. Sir Edward Neville would never have thought of such a thing in old times; but Harry had been to all intents and purposes master at home during the past few months, and this was one of the results of his mastership.

Before they had half finished breakfast,

Sir Ralph Armytage made his appearance. He had ridden hard, and came in, in an exuberant state of health and spirits. He had sent Snaffle with the horses round to the stable, he said, to rest for an hour; but he thought, if quite convenient to the ladies, it would be as well if they were to start soon after that, as he had found on his return home the night before that the meet was to be at eleven and not at twelve o'clock, as he had thought, and they would only just have time enough to reach Purley comfortably by that hour.

The sight of his bright, almost handsome, young face, radiant as it was with happiness on that particular morning, haunted Edith Vivian for many a day after. His high spirits, too, were infectious, and the breakfast party, under his influence, became a very merry one. Captain Neville took the trouble to be far more civil to his cousin than he generally was, and she, in her turn, was unusually gracious. Both were rejoicing, you see, in the comfortable con-

sciousness that each was desirous of the other's company.

“She as good as asked me to go,” Harry said to himself.

“After what he said about Sir Ralph's horses, I am certain he will ride, if only to take care of me,” was the secret thought of Edith's heart.

Fanny Price skirmished about as usual, although she had had her breakfast long before, and made successful forays occasionally on her Uncle Harry's plate, he shamefully aiding and abetting her in the said wickedness.

Only poor Mary Neville sat, at the head of the table, a little silent and preoccupied. She was thinking, with a sort of helpless nervousness, of the coming expedition, and of what it might bring forth.

The horses were a few minutes late in coming round to the door, but Miss Vivian, who was punctual almost to a fault, came down ready dressed for her ride exactly at the time Sir Ralph had named. To his

great delight he was standing alone in the hall when she made her appearance. For so young a man, he could be bold enough at times, and now he seemed to feel no scruple in feasting his eyes with the sight of her marvellous beauty. Certainly she did look gloriously beautiful as she came slowly down the wide oaken staircase, gathering up the skirts of her riding habit in her hand. It was one of Poole's masterpieces, and fitted her to perfection. Her hat was of the 'chimney-pot' type, not so common then as now, but it suited well the somewhat severe style of her features. A *mignonne* pretty face often looks to best advantage in a low-crowned hat, but for a really handsome woman give me the 'chimney-pot.' Her gloves and *chaussure* were simply perfect. If Miss Vivian was ever inclined to be personally extravagant it was on her riding-dress, possibly because she knew, that she never looked so well in any other.

The young baronet stood for a few seconds like one spell-bound, with his eyes riveted

on her face. He had been much spoilt of late by the fair sex in general, and had acquired a bad habit of sometimes indulging his own fancies, at the expense of other people's feelings. Miss Vivian did not altogether relish this critical scrutiny, but when, with a flushing cheek and a stammering tongue, he began speaking a few words of unqualified compliment, something that he saw in the eyes which she suddenly raised to his, brought him to a full stop in the middle of a sentence. After all it was rather too bad of her. Up to this point she had given him every possible encouragement of word and look and manner, and now, all in a moment, and without any apparent reason, she chose to turn upon him, and to resent his unmistakable attentions as an impertinence. How *was* the poor young fellow to be expected to know, which was the exact boundary-line where acceptable homage ended, and offensive admiration began? But 'the poor young fellow,' as the reader has no doubt by this time discovered,

was blessed with a fair share of self-confidence, not to say self-conceit, and he soon rallied from the shock of Miss Vivian's slight rebuff.

The truth was, her thoughts were occupied just then, not so much with Sir Ralph Armytage, who was looking at *her*, as with some one else whom *she* was looking for, and could not see. Where was her cousin all this time? and why was he not here also? Could it be possible that he had changed his mind, and did not mean to go after all? She had grown strangely nervous on the subject of this ride. All of a sudden, while she was dressing, it had assumed the aspect of a penance rather than a pleasure, at least unless her cousin Harry made one of the party. And even at this eleventh hour, she almost resolved that she would make some excuse for giving it up, if she found at the last that he was not going with them.

She went into the breakfast-room and sat down, but Harry was not there. Sir Ralph followed her, and made good use of the op-

portunity for conversation thus afforded him, until the not unwelcome sound of the door-bell was heard pealing through the hall, and the next moment the announcement was made that the horses were at the door.

“Are we to wait for the carriage-people, or to go on without them?” Edith asked, as Sir Ralph jumped up rather eagerly off his chair, and offered her his arm.

“Oh, Mary said we were to go on, her father would not be ready just yet; but they will follow in a few minutes, and will soon catch us up.”

Edith could find no excuse for delay, so she let herself be led off unresistingly to the door. One rapid glance which she threw around as she walked down the steps, satisfied her on several points. Two of Sir Ralph’s horses stood close to the door. A black hunter, called from his rather low stature, the Black Dwarf, which was doubtless the one Harry Neville had spoken of, and a bay mare with a lady’s saddle. Queen Mab was a beautiful little creature to look

at, and it was not wonderful that her master was proud of her. Edith Vivian knew enough about horses to feel a prospective pleasure at the sight of the 'mount' with which Sir Ralph had provided her; but what pleased her still more, was the glimpse she had caught of Captain Neville standing at a little distance and talking to a groom who was holding the bridles of two horses. One was Snaffle's, and the other was Harry's own horse, Rob Roy. This was proof positive that the latter meant to ride, but still he kept aloof. Snaffle touched his hat, and stepped forward to mount 'the lady,' but his master pushed him on one side, and took the matter into his own hands.

He had much better have let it alone, and left Snaffle to do his own work. He was not an adept at 'mounting a lady,' never having had much practice in the art, and it is an art which requires, as most people know, practice more than either strength or skill. "It is the simplest of all gymnastics," says the author of 'Barren Honour,' "if you

know how to do it, and if there exists between you and the fair Amazon a certain sympathy and good understanding. In default of these elements of concord it is probable that the whole thing may come to grief."

Now Sir Ralph did *not* know how to do it properly; and the whole thing did, to some extent, come to grief. Like 'Harding Knowles,' he lifted at the wrong moment, half a second after Edith made her spring. The consequence of which was, that although she eventually reached the saddle, it was only after a little ignominious struggle on her own part, which she was not accustomed to, and did not altogether appreciate. Left quite to herself, she knew she could have accomplished the manœuvre neatly enough, but she had been much more hindered than helped by what her cavalier was pleased to call his assistance.

Edith wondered whether her cousin had been watching; she rather hoped he had not. Snaffle's face she could not see. He had

turned away his head to hide the broad grin which had spread over his features “at seeing master make such a precious mess of it.” Sir Ralph himself was the least disturbed of the three. Wrapped in the slight panoply of self-conceit of which I have before spoken, and having had previously to do with less agile damsels, he fancied he had acquitted himself bravely, although his hat had come off in the process, as it generally did. Unmindful of his companion’s late rebuke, he lingered a moment by her side, and, as Snaffle was leading his own horse round, he stooped over Queen Mab’s neck, caressing and stroking her satin skin, and then bade her, in a low tone, do her very best that day, for she had never carried anything half so precious before.

This time Edith only laughed, and told him not to talk such nonsense. She could afford not to care now, for there was a certain sense of protection in the very sight of her cousin Harry, who was by this time on Rob Roy’s back, and preparing to join the others.

Once in the saddle, too, her spirits revived as if by magic. The fresh morning air and the bright sunshine were in themselves delightful. Moreover, she had not been on horseback for more than a month, and the very sound of Queen Mab's footsteps on the yielding turf was pleasant to her ears. And so, cantering on at a brisk pace and chatting merrily with her two companions who rode on either side of her, the vague gloomy presentiments of the morning were quickly forgotten, and for the time being our heroine gave herself up to the perfect enjoyment of her ride.

CHAPTER XII.

Now, if any of my readers are anticipating, with a certain amount of relish, that I am about to describe how Miss Vivian was thrown from her horse, or run away with by that same horse, or placed in any other position of imminent peril, and rescued by the gallant conduct of one or other of her cavaliers, they had better skip to the end of this chapter at once, for I forewarn them that they will certainly be disappointed. This is not a sensational story, as they will long ago have discovered for themselves, and I am not going to indulge them now, with anything half so exciting as a dreadful accident, not even with a broken leg or a dislocated arm, for nothing of the kind occurred.

Queen Mab behaved beautifully on the whole, making allowance for a certain amount of freshness and friskiness at starting, which her rider was perfectly able to cope with, and rather enjoyed than otherwise. Indeed, but for something which took place a little later in the day, Edith Vivian would have thought her morning's excursion one of almost unmixed pleasure.

Only two events worthy to be ranked even as adventures happened, neither of them of a serious character, and of each of these Sir Ralph himself was the hero. Adventure Number One took place about four miles from Haughton. They were a little late at starting, as I said before, and had ridden fast to make up for lost time, when all of a sudden, in the middle of a quick trot, the Black Dwarf came to a full-stop, very nearly sending his rider over head and ears into the middle of the high-road.

Sir Ralph felt strongly inclined to anathematize, but it was soon discovered that

the poor animal had cast a shoe. It was vexatious, inasmuch as it involved delay ; but fortunately, as it happened, there was a blacksmith's not many yards distant, and Snaffle led off the Black Dwarf to this forge to have the mischief remedied, while the others followed him at their leisure down the lane.

I believe that by this time the young Baronet had in his heart sorely repented of having pressed Captain Neville on the preceding day to accompany them ; and yet he had the magnanimity even now to propose that Harry should ride on with Miss Vivian to the meet, and leave him to overtake them as soon as his horse returned ; or that the former should go on by himself, and follow the hounds according to his father's wish. (About the magnanimity of the last suggestion there might have been a doubt.) Both propositions were, however, negatived by his companions. They protested that they had come out much more for the pleasure of the ride than for the

sake of the meet, and had no intention of parting company.

It did not seem very long before Snaffle made his reappearance with the two horses ; and yet, by the time Sir Ralph was again in the saddle, it was not far from eleven o'clock. They had noticed the Haughton carriage pass along the high-road, while they were waiting in the lane, and one or two stray horsemen in scarlet were to be seen galloping about in different directions.

They rode on now faster even than before, and the Black Dwarf began to show signs of the evil temper of which Harry Neville had spoken in the morning. Certainly, he was not a pleasant companion for a lady's horse. He had been somewhat restive from the first ; and now, fretted by the recent delay, he plunged and reared in a way which kept his rider, to say the least of it, constantly on the watch.

On they went at a swinging gallop, until they came to Purley Wood, where the road being narrower, they were compelled to

draw rein, and ride at a more leisurely pace. Black Dwarf still kept a good length ahead, champing viciously at the bit, and evidently very impatient of the curb, which Sir Ralph had been compelled to draw tighter.

After all, they were too late for the meet, though only by a few minutes. Just because they were a little behindhand, of course every one else had been extra punctual. The dogs 'found' immediately, and the fox took the road from Purley Bottom towards Purley Wood.

Then came adventure Number Two, which might have been attended with more serious results, had not Sir Ralph been really a splendid rider, and accustomed to horses from his childhood upwards.

Just as the three had emerged from the outskirts of Purley Wood, and were cantering along some high ground separated from the broad country road by a steepish bank, they turned a sharp corner, and came all of a sudden upon the whole 'field,' fox, hounds, hunters, and all, tearing along at full pelt

upon the high-road just beneath them, and over the ploughed fields which stretched away on the other side.

The Black Dwarf could stand it no longer. Every nerve and muscle of his body was convulsed with a sudden thrill, as if he had been electrified. To throw his head back with a violent snort, and rear upon his hind-legs till he nearly fell backwards, was the work of one instant. In the next, he had cleared the intervening bank with a bound which would have unseated any less practised rider, and was dashing madly after the hounds as fast as his legs would carry him, bearing poor Sir Ralph, in an agony of impotent rage, upon his back.

Away over the ploughed fields, and through the broad valley beyond; over a five-barred gate, and through a quick-set hedge; on went the Black Dwarf and his black-coated rider, plainly discernible among all the other scarlet ones, till at last distance hid them both from view.

Then Edith, with an expression of dismay

upon her face, turned to look at her cousin, and found that he had laid firm hold of Queen Mab's bridle. She had never thought about her own horse since the moment she had checked her, when Sir Ralph made his involuntary leap.

Now, the pretty little animal she was mounted on was a thorough-bred ; and, like most thorough-breds, though gentle and good-tempered as a child, was yet apt to grow very nervous and excited when anything out of the common way occurred. Startled at the disappearance of her companion, she laid her pretty ears back in a way which meant mischief, and looked very much inclined to follow his lead ; seeing which, and seeing also that Edith's thoughts were far away at the moment, Harry had laid his strong hand on the mare's bridle to keep her under control.

Rob Roy behaved nobly, standing firm and still as a rock. He seemed to remember that he was a soldier's horse, and to know what was expected of him at such a crisis.

Captain Neville met his cousin's frightened look with a quiet, reassuring smile. "Don't alarm yourself about Ralph, pray," he said; "he knows too well what he is about, to come to any kind of grief."

"But what are we to do next?" she asked.

"Well, I suppose you don't want to follow the hounds, my dear cousin, do you?" said Harry, in the languid tone he sometimes thought fit to adopt.

"No, indeed!"

"Then the first thing we have to do is to look after the mare, for *she* seems to me to have every intention of doing so if we don't stop her."

So saying, he dismounted, still with some degree of deliberation, and calling to Snaffle to hold his own horse, proceeded to give his undivided attention to Queen Mab (*and* her rider *bien entendu*). It was quite true that the mare was growing more and more excited, as one stray horseman after another, in dazzling 'pink,' galloped past. Her

eyes grew prominent and eager, and she cast back longing glances at the bank down which her companion had disappeared. But Harry, standing in front of her, soothed and caressed her with his voice and hand, and gradually drew her farther away from the tempting spot.

While he was thus occupied, he happened to look up as he heard the sound of approaching wheels ; and then, making a comical sort of face, he quickly shifted his position.

“ What’s the matter now ? ” asked Edith, laughing.

“ Oh, nothing much,” he answered, “ only that carriage coming along the high ground there, and which will pass close to us directly, belongs to Mrs. Rivers. She is a neighbour of ours, and a terrible old gossip, so I don’t exactly want her to see me here.”

“ Mrs. Rivers ? ” repeated Edith, thoughtfully. “ Who is she ? Do I know her ? have I ever seen her ? I seem to know the name.”

“ Mrs. Marmaduke Rivers,” replied Harry, looking steadily into his cousin’s face. “ You

have seen her once, I know. Once too often, you thought it at the time, I fancy."

In an instant she remembered when and where. Perhaps something in the look of his eyes helped her to recall the past. The little inn at Königswinter,—the large noisy party,—the crowded dining-room,—and the bold, curious stare with which Mrs. Rivers had thought fit to honour her as she passed through, all rushed upon her memory, and the dread that those sharp lynx-like eyes might recognize her now, overpowered all other considerations.

"Oh, Harry, what shall I do?" she exclaimed, almost crying. "You will help me, won't you? I remember her perfectly now, and I would not have her see me for the world!"

How she trusted him, after all. If there had been ten other men there, I believe she would never have dreamt of asking any one of them to help her but himself. It was the first time she had called him by his Christian name, without any garnish or pre-

fix whatever. He was perfectly aware of the fact, and the sound was music to his ears, but he took no apparent notice of it, only turning away his head for one moment to hide the smile of pleasure which her words had caused. Then drawing a step nearer, he said, in a low tone, but still very coolly,—

“ Suppose you were to find out that your stirrup or saddle wanted something doing to it. If she does not see my face, she is not likely to recognize you; and as she will know Snaffle’s livery, she may fancy that we are stray members of the Oakley party. What do you think ?”

By way of answer, Edith laid her hand on her cousin’s shoulder as he was stooping beside her. “ Suppose I were to come down altogether to make sure ?” she said. “ I have never been quite comfortable since I mounted this morning.”

His arm was round her waist before she had time to change her mind, and I am afraid he held it there a moment longer than

he had the slightest warrant for doing. If there had been fifty old women like Mrs. Rivers to see him, he was too much of a man to let slip such a chance.

“I thought Master Ralph made rather a mess of putting you up,” he said, as he busied himself over her stirrup-leathers.

“Why did you not come and offer to do it better, then?” she answered, a little saucily. “I know you can.”

“Nay, you were going to ride Ralph’s horse; it was not my place to interfere. Now for it,” he added, laughing, and stooping still lower as Mrs. Rivers’s carriage came dashing up. “To be seen or not to be seen, that is the question.”

Edith could hardly help laughing in concert, at the sheer absurdity of their position. He actually hiding himself behind Queen Mab, and she standing with her back completely turned upon the carriage as it passed, for fear of being seen. It was a cowardly proceeding, by no means in accordance with her usual straightforward mode of acting.

And after all they might both have saved themselves the trouble, for Mrs. Rivers was not there.

When Harry told her so with a sly smile, a feeling of reaction set in, and she began to be very much ashamed of having shown so much anxiety on the subject. He was far too gentlemanly, however, to take any advantage of the circumstance, and went on fumbling with the straps for some little time longer in silence.

“Now would you like to get up again?” he asked presently. “The ground is very wet, and you will get your feet damp if you stand about long.”

She was ready, she said, and, taking her foot in one hand, he mounted her in first-rate style.

“Is *that* right?” he asked, not without a certain sense of pride in his performance.

“I am quite comfortable in the saddle, thank you, but the stirrup seems just the same as it was before.”

“It *is* precisely the same; I buckled it into the self-same hole.”

Whereupon she gave him back a look of saucy intelligence which he would not have missed for a hundred pounds.

And all this time Snaffle kept at a safe distance, just beyond ear-shot. Perhaps they fondly imagined that because he sat bolt upright as a statue, and apparently deeply engrossed in taking care of the other two horses, that he was taking no notice of their proceedings; but if they could have heard that worthy holding forth at night in the housekeeper’s room at Oakley, they would have found out they were mistaken.

“I wouldn’t give that for master’s chance,” he observed to his friend Martha Boggs, the still-room maid, snapping his fingers by way of illustration, “after I see the innings the Captain got as soon as his back was turned. It was enough to make you die o’ laughing to see ‘em making love over the straps and things; I never knowed there was anything so sweet about stirrup-

leathers afore." From which it will be seen that he had no idea whatever of the real reason for which Miss Vivian had dismounted.

"And now what is to be done next?" Edith asked, as her cousin gathered up the reins and gave them into her hand.

"To stop quietly here I should suggest, if you have no objection," was his answer. "Ralph won't be long in riding back, you may take my word for it, when once he can get his horse's head turned this way; and if we move away from here, he may not know where to find us."

Edith had nothing to urge against this arrangement, and so they settled to wait where they were, and then they began to talk of other things.

"Do you remember the last time I took care of you on horseback?" Harry said presently, as leaning both his arms on Queen Mab's neck he looked straight up into his cousin's face.

Did she not remember? The name of

Mrs. Rivers alone would have recalled the whole scene to her memory, if it had not been vividly imprinted there before.

“Oh yes, I remember quite well,” she answered quietly; “do you?”

It was a dangerous question to ask, and justly deserved the answer which it provoked. “Of course I do. Do you think for a moment that I *could* forget?” And as he said this he had an expression on his face before which her own eyes fell.

“What a storm we had that afternoon, to be sure,” she said a little hurriedly; “and I remember, too, how your friend Mr. Fitzgerald amused us with a description of his adventures on the Drachenfels two or three days before. By the bye, how is Mr. Fitzgerald, and where is he?” she added a moment after, by way of changing the subject.

“Dear old Fitz! you may well ask where is he? Doing his duty in the Crimea, like a noble old trump, as he is. He volunteered his services soon after he came back

last year, and went out a month or two ago, laden with tons of arrowroot, and brandy, and all the good things of this life, and some hundred dozen pairs of muffetees to boot ; and I wish to my heart I was there with him."

" You do ? Why ?"

" Because it would be something worth living for, to be able to help those brave fellows before Sebastopol, instead of leading such an idle, moping, useless life as I do here. Don't you agree with me ?"

" From what I have heard, you were of a good deal of use to your father a little while ago," said Edith softly, blushing deeply as she spoke.

" Poor old governor ! well, I hope I was. But that is over now, you see, and there is little or nothing left for me to do here. I am not joking, I assure you. Seriously, I have all but made up my mind to go out as a volunteer to the Crimean army in the spring, if nothing else should turn up in the meantime."

" You are not in earnest ?"

“I am. Don’t you believe me?”

“I don’t believe that there is nothing left for you to do here. Every man may make work for himself if he will; surely you have not forgotten what Carlyle says about that? Besides, what would your father say?”

“I can’t help what he would say. He would not like it, of course; but he will have to lose me in a year’s time, if not sooner; and a man has a duty to perform to himself as well as to others. The sort of life I have been leading for the last few weeks has not been good for me, either mentally or bodily, and I feel that I *must* have a change of some kind before long.”

Once more he fixed his eyes steadily on Edith’s face, and once more her own eyes fell before that look.

Did he expect any answer to those last words? It seemed so, for when she began toying with her whip, laying it gently on Queen Mab’s glossy neck, he caught the point of it in his hand, as if to arrest her attention.

“ You know best, I suppose,” she said at last in a very low voice, and without looking at him.

“ Yes, I suppose I do know what is best for myself, at any rate, and perhaps for others too,” he answered with a half sigh. And then, as if half-unconsciously, his fingers travelled from the point of her whip upwards, till it reached the part which her hand was holding.

It was a costly little affair, this whip ; inlaid about the handle with turquoise and ivory, and, as ill luck would have it, attracted his attention.

“ By Jupiter ! that *is* a whip !” he exclaimed laughing, and taking it into his hand. Where in the world did you get that extravagant bauble ?”

What a stupid unwarrantable question to ask ! Why on earth could he not have left well alone, and not meddled with things which did not concern him ? And just as they were getting on so well, too, so much better than they had done at any time before,

since Edith came to Haughton. The cloud which had come between them seemed to have vanished quite away for the time being. He had thrown aside all his affectation and sarcasm and reserve, and been again the very same Harry Neville of six months ago, and she had been so happy, feeling as if those old pleasant Rhine days had come back once more. And now he had gone and spoilt it all. She did not speak just directly, and when she did, it was not in answer to his question.

“Don’t you think it is pretty?” she asked evasively.

“Well, I don’t know; it is a little too showy for my taste. I like everything about a lady’s riding-dress to be as quiet as possible.”

“So do I, and about her dress at all times, don’t you?” she added, hoping to change the subject of conversation.

But he had noticed her previous hesitation, and was not to be put off so easily. If there was any mystery about this riding-

whip, as he strongly suspected, he was resolved to sift it to the bottom.

“Is this French or English?” he asked, looking at it somewhat curiously. “Where did you buy it?”

“I can’t say; I did not buy it all.”

“No?” The word was distinctly a question, and his eyes as distinctly demanded an answer. A question he had no right to ask, perhaps, and one to which he had no right to expect an answer; and yet Edith was too proud to refuse the challenge. I believe that she would have been a happier being, *for the moment*, if she could have remained silent, or if she had been capable of equivocating. But it was not in her nature.

“If you *must* know, it was given to me this morning,” she said as lightly as she could, though her cheek grew crimson as she spoke.

The whip dropped out of his hand, as if it had burnt his fingers. But the instinct of the gentleman was very strong within him. He stooped to pick it up the instant

after, and as he returned it to her he said, “I beg your pardon for being so awkward, I hope I have not hurt it.”

She would rather he had broken it into fragments, ground it into powder beneath his heel, than that he should have looked at her and spoken to her as he did then.

All the light had faded out of his eyes, all the music was gone from his voice. He turned sternly away, and taking hold once more of Queen Mab’s bridle, he looked into *her* eyes now with an earnestness which could hardly have been greater if life or death had depended on the steadfastness of his gaze. The evil spirit of jealousy had entered into his heart, and the ‘last state of this man was worse than the first.’

Poor Edith sat quite still, feeling utterly miserable and helpless. She longed to throw the wretched little riding-whip (so tawdry it looked to her now) into the horse-pond, which stood invitingly near. She longed oh, how earnestly—to tell Harry that it had been forced on her acceptance against her

better judgment, during those few minutes that she had been alone with Sir Ralph in the breakfast-room.

But he gave her no opportunity. When he spoke again it was on some commonplace subject, and before he had said a dozen words they saw Sir Ralph riding rapidly towards them. They heard the clattering of his horse's hoofs on the high road before he came in sight, and when he did they both noticed that he looked excited and provoked to the last degree. His lips and cheeks were actually white with passion. The Black Dwarf had had his own way for a certain time, but his master had got the better of him at last; and now the vials of his wrath were being poured out upon the poor animal on account of his late 'escapade.' Standing nearly upright in his stirrups, Sir Ralph was dealing him hard heavy blows with the butt end of his whip, with a violence which would have been cruel in any one, but was specially cruel in a man who professed to be fond of horses. If ever

the young baronet had had a chance with Edith Vivian, he lost it then. There was a savage *animal* look in his face which frightened her, revealing as it did the secret of dark uncontrollable passions, which one would scarcely have expected to find lurking beneath an exterior apparently so gay and *débonnaire* as was Ralph Armytage's. Such a temper, she felt, would not be a safe one for any woman to have to deal with. All the chivalry of her nature, too, was in arms at the sight of his cruelty. When he came riding up to her, and began pouring forth a few hurried words of apology for having been carried away from her against his will, she stopped him short instantly.

“Pray leave your servant to punish your horse another time, Sir Ralph!” she said, drawing herself up to her full height, and flinging the words at him with all the scorn of which she was capable. “All my life I never could bear to see a gentleman strike a dumb animal. You have no right to be so angry because the poor thing followed the

instincts of his nature. My own horse would have done the same, I believe, if it had not been for my cousin's thoughtfulness."

Her words cut him to the heart like very swords, but they had the effect nevertheless of bringing him to his senses, and exorcising the evil demon which had taken possession of his soul. The colour rushed up into his face, and his eyes filled with tears; but for very shame's sake, I believe they would have fallen. For a moment or two he remained silent, and looked like one utterly bewildered; then, gulping down his mortification as best he could, he stammered out a few broken words of apology, not for his horse this time, but for himself.

Poor fellow, it was rather hard upon him. After all he was very young, not yet one-and-twenty, and no doubt it must have been a severe trial to his temper to be run away with against his will, just in the very hour which he had been looking forward to as one of unmixed delight.

As for Harry Neville, he could not resist

a certain secret feeling of satisfaction at the 'drubbing' his rival had just come in for, and at the sight of his discomfiture. It was not to be expected, I suppose, of a man subject to the weaknesses of our poor human nature that it could be otherwise, more particularly after that little episode of the riding-whip. And yet he could be generous even then.

"Has the fox managed to get off, Ralph?" he asked, by way of changing the conversation and giving the other a chance of recovering himself.

"No, they've got him sure enough," Sir Ralph answered; "the sly fellow doubled back though, after running through Purley Wood, and when I left, he was making off as fast as his little legs would take him towards Englefield Copse."

"Then if I were to ride straight over those fields yonder, and make a short cut through Colonel Buckley's park, I might come up with him even yet, and be in at the death after all. I've half a mind to try."

So saying, he laid his hand on Rob Roy's mane, and sprang lightly into the saddle, preparatory to making a start. Out of tune as he felt just then with the world in general, and his cousin Edith in particular, he seemed to think it would be fairer if he were to leave these other two to fight out their little quarrel without his help. Perhaps too, the instincts of the hunter were stronger in him than he chose to confess.

“Do you really think you will catch the fox?” said Edith, turning her eyes upon him, with a look of regret which he could not doubt was genuine.

“Well, I don't know, my dear cousin,” he answered, with a light laugh, “but as Leech's immortal Frenchman said, ‘I will *triaj.*’”

“Be sure you bring me back the brush, then, cousin Harry!”

He raised his hat courteously to her, as he would have done to any other lady, then gave ‘Rob Roy’ a slight touch of the spur,

and the noble old animal was off like a shot. Edith sat watching their movements as long as there was anything to be seen, utterly oblivious as it seemed of what Sir Ralph's feelings might be at such an exhibition of interest.

And so long as Harry was in sight, she saw him riding straight as an arrow across the country, taking hedges and ditches and every obstacle that came in his way, in a masterly style, which showed that it was no want of either skill or courage that had kept him back before.

END OF VOL. II.



